RHODA.

A NOVEL.

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BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THINGS BY THEIR RIGHT NAMES,"

AND "PLAIN SENSE."

"I teach the useful science to be good." *Pope.*

"Pour réussir par les ouvrages d'imagination, il faut peut-être, présenter une morale facile au milieu des mœurs sévères; mais au milieu des mœurs corrompues le tableau d'une morale austère est le seul qu'il faille constamment offrir."

Staël, de la Litterature.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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RHODA.

CHAP. XLIX.

"Thoughts of the past within her bosom press."

Crabbe.

RHODA walked out alone upon the shore, lost in a variety of indistinct reflections, which so mingled the past, the present, and the future, as left her hardly a consciousness of what, or where she was.

Byrhley, and all that Byrhley once offered to her choice, was present to her mind:—its value rose, as she represented it in the possession of another.

"If," thought she, "if,"—and without concluding the supposition, she hurried to the consequence,—"I, too, might have ministered to the wants of Mr. Wyburg;

might have been followed by his approving eye; been blessed by his dying accents!—I might have received into my protection the happiness of his beloved daughter, and have been thought sufficient to the trust—but I am estranged from his heart!—I am an alien to his approbation! Another has taken my place; a place of which he thinks me unworthy. And for what has this been exchanged?—For pleasures that I would gladly barter for the sorrows of Byrhley."

Engrossed by a train of thoughts such as these, Rhoda wandered on, unheeding of her path, until she was startled by coming almost in contact with an approaching object.—She looked up, and beheld Lord William St. Quintin.

"I dare not say that I am glad to see you, my dear Lady Osbourne," said he, with the tone of the tenderest sympathy, "for I fear I see you in pain, or grief?"

"In grief, my lord," said Rhoda; "and in grief that makes me wish to be alone." She would have passed on.

"Grief and disappointment are the offspring of every hour," returned Lord William, accompanying her steps: "I have had my share; and here, where I thought that I should have found a balm for my past evils, I meet a fresh one in your distress."

Rhoda was silent.

"Have I been misinformed?" said Lord William, still urging conference—"I was told that you found your situation entirely to your mind."

"It was every thing that was delightful, till within this hour," said Rhoda, with a sigh.

"And will be so again, I trust," said Lord William; "the mischief is not irretrievable, I hope?"

"Not yet;—and yet it may be!—Oh how distance aggravates apprehension!"

"And gives more scope for hope," returned Lord William. "Indulge it, my dear Lady Osbourne:—I prophesy that all will be well."

"You do not know the cause of my apprehension," said Rhoda.

"I can penetrate it," replied Lord William:—"Did I not always," added he, with a smile, "tell you that I could understand you by half a word?"

"Let us walk to the house," said Rhoda, who found that she could not so easily shake off her present companion, as she could disengage herself from Sir James.—"Sir James will be a better companion than I am, and he will be very glad to see you."

Provided he might follow, Lord William did not care where Rhoda led, and skilfully endeavouring to withdraw her thoughts from herself, by directing them to the objects around, he slowly accompanied her to the cottage.

Sir James saw them from a distance, and, joining them, after some surprise and some civilities on thus so unexpectedly meeting Lord William, they entered the doors together, and Rhoda took this moment to withdraw into her own room.

The meeting with Lord William, and the gentle compulsion with which he had

directed the current of her thoughts, had enabled her to recover a greater command over herself.—She began to view the case as it appeared to the eye of reason, divested of all the colours with which imagination, and wayward will, had tinctured it. There still remained sufficient to excite her grief,—an almost parent was at the point of death,—a dear friend was threatened with the severest evil that could befal her:—but what ground was there for those selfish murmurings, from whence had arisen the most unmanageable part of her sorrow?—Could she indeed regret that the offices of friendship and sympathy, which circumstances forbade her to administer, were supplied by one, who yielded not to herself in the zeal and tenderness which actuated the performance? Could she wish that the affections, the course of which she had so roughly checked, should not find another channel, where they might flow to the happiness of the possessor?

"I were the worst of monopolists, if I would withhold that from others, by which I have refused to benefit myself.—How should I have rejoiced that my dear Frances had had any *other* such friend! I will rejoice that she has *this*."

Under this impression, Rhoda replied to Miss Wyburg. Her letter breathed at once the tenderness and generosity of her heart, and Miss Wyburg felt it as the cordial that it was meant to be.

Rhoda had said, "I would not have written, I would have come;—but I see the impediment, and while I feel the consolation of which it deprives me, I rejoice that I am *thus* rendered valueless."

Never, however, did Rhoda rate higher in the estimation of her friend than when she read these words; and Rhoda, in writing them, had obtained a conquest over her more ignoble feelings, which procured her a glow of self-approbation, cheaply purchased by the struggle that had preceded it.

Her grief thus calmed in its sensation, and dignified in its nature, Rhoda had no disinclination to return to the sitting-room; and she there heard with pleasure that Lord William had become their neighbour.

"Some family occurrences have put me out of humour," said Lord William.—"I am come to recover my temper in this extreme point of his majesty's dominions.—I detest a sea bathing-place, but I love the sea.—Here, I know that at worst I should only have my own company to quarrel with; and at *best* that I might be admitted into that which I am now in."

Sir James bowed, and Rhoda felt complacent. The society of Lord William had ever possessed for her a charm, which her reason was at times unwilling to acknowledge, and which it could scarcely ever explain; but since the empire which she had assumed over him, she had seldom cause to disapprove either of his manners

or his sentiments. His conversation never failed to interest her, and there often appeared a similarity in their taste, that formed an union between them equally flattering to each.

"Lord William loves the sea," thought she, with a feeling of pleasure. "He will better appreciate its beauties than Sir James does. I shall now be able to speak, without the fear of not being understood."

Sir James thought that an addition to their *tête-à-tête* might assist in preventing Rhoda's feelings from dwelling too intensely on the scene that was passing at Byrhley.—He asked Lord William to dinner.

CHAP. L.



"To mingle friendship far, is mingling bloods."
Shakspeare.

An entire fortnight elapsed without any second letter from Miss Wyburg; but it was not a fortnight without pleasurable interest to Rhoda. Lord William appeared with increasing claims to her favour. What she had fancied had been induced by her influence over him, now appeared to be his genuine character.

Was it possible that her present companion could ever have been the self-sufficient flatterer, whose admiration seemed more to be given to confer honour, than to confess inferiority?—the sporter of daring maxims, that shocked all moral feeling?—the sarcastic commentator on manners

and persons?—the insolent scoffer at the opinions of others? Every shade of sauciness or impertinence was gone;—he appeared only as the acute, though indulgent, discriminator between right and wrong; the warm enthusiast in all the beauties of nature, and of those more especially which were now spread before him; the well-informed scholar; the amusing, good-humoured companion; and, above all, the affectionate, undesigning friend.

"This, then, is the Lord William St. Quintin of which I have heard," thought Rhoda; "and which certainly I never before saw. Is it possible that difference of position can alter the very nature of the object?"

Rhoda no longer found her walks solitary. No longer when she raised her eye, beaming with feelings that she could not repress, was her enthusiasm checked by the blank countenance of her incomprehensive companion. A glance from Lord William's eye told her that she was

understood; a word from him was a comment, better than her text. He spoke of the qualities of the marine productions which every moment arrested their attention, of the wonders of the deep, and of the whole economy of nature, as though he had been the wise king of Israel himself. Sir James observed, that there could not be a more instructive companion,—and Rhoda thought that she could listen for ever; and all this with so little effort, so carelessly, so gracefully, that it was plain the stream was deep, which ran at once so smoothly and so clear.

Rhoda had from her first coming into the Isle of Wight wished to go upon the sea, as well as to walk along its shores; and Sir James, though no lover of sailing himself, had been willing to indulge her, but the day was never fine enough: it was too cold, or, too hot; or there was too much wind, or there was not enough; she might be sick; she might be becalmed; or it was difficult to get a boat;

or there was no convenient place at which to embark; yet still they were to sail—sometime—some gifted moment, which was to unite all that was desirable, and to exclude all that could be feared.—The sadness of Rhoda's heart had for some days laid asleep the wish for any amusement that could require effort, but Lord William had penetrated her desires.

"Have you ever been upon the sea?" said he, one morning, as the friendly two were walking by its side.

"No," said Rhoda.

"No," said Sir James, "something has always prevented us."

"You are not afraid?" said Lord William, looking towards a little vessel that seemed to be approaching where they stood, and which came gliding over the surface of the waves, spreading its white sails to a bright sun; and gay with particoloured streamers that floated from its mast head.

"Afraid!—Oh no, I long to sail!"

"Then nothing need prevent us now,"

said Lord William; "the day, the hour, every thing invites us.—I know the proprietor of that vessel, and I know he would be proud that it should contribute to your pleasure."

Then making a signal to the waterman, which was obeyed with a promptness that almost seemed to say it was waited-for:—"We will be on board in a moment," added he.

"But how will Rhoda get on board?" said Sir James;—"and if the wind should rise——"

"My dear Sir James," said Lord William, "the wind will *not* rise,—I am its guarantee that it will not; and Lady Osbourne shall walk into the boat as easily as into her own coach."

The boat was by this time come abreast of a rock which jutted out into the water; but at the base of which the sea was too shallow to admit its close approach.

"Rhoda can never pass from that rock into the boat," said Sir James.

"I think she will," said Lord William, smiling;—and as he said this, the boatmen were seen to throw from the vessel a board, with cramping irons, by which one of the men made one end of the plank fast to the rock, while the other secured it at the contrary end to the side of the vessel. Lord William ran down to the place, and after passing and repassing over the board and assuring himself that all was safe and firm:—"Now," said he, "my dear Lady Osbourne, if you will be kind enough to give me your hand, I think I may venture to say, I will seat you safely and commodiously in the boat."

Rhoda, delighted with the readiness and obligingness, the vivacity and good-breeding with which all this had been done, exclaimed,—"How charming! There is no difficulty at all, I see.—I am sure we are extremely obliged to you."

"Merely the thought of a moment," said Lord William. "Put up the awning, my

good friend," said he, to the boatman.—"What brought you here this morning?"

"I have just landed my master," said the man, "out yonder, there; and I am to return to fetch him in the evening."

"You know me?" said Lord William.

"Yes, surely, my lord, very well," returned the man.

"Then you know that your master will have no objection to this lady taking a sail, while he does not want the boat."

"Oh, not the least in the world, I'll be bound for it.—Where would your lordship please to go?"

The choice was referred to Rhoda: she had no choice. She thought at that moment that she had nothing to wish. Lord William gave the word; and then turning his attention wholly to the amusement of Rhoda, he maintained a conversation during the whole time of the sailing, which, without abstracting her attention from the scene before them, obviated all the tediousness usually accompanying the uniformity and inactivity of sea

pleasures. Sir James even said, that he could not have believed a sailing party could have been so pleasant; and Rhoda, as she thanked Lord William for the amusement he had given her, declared that she never remembered to have passed three such agreeable hours.

She repeated the observation to Sir James, when they were alone together; and she added, "that of all people whom she knew, Lord William best understood how to dull the sting of apprehension, without substituting those distractions which leave the mind more languid, and more unhappy when they are passed."

But it was not in the science of Lord William to make Rhoda forget, or even wholly to suspend the anxiety with which she looked to a second account from Byrhley. There her genuine affections were centred; and there, had she known what it was to be wise, she would have found her happiness; and while distress and sorrow were inmates there, no where else could she be happy.

The days passed slowly and painfully along.—She looked with desire to the hour of the post; but she drew hope from its being a blank to her.

Thus passed a fortnight: at the end of which time two lines from Frances told her, "that Mr. Wyburg still lived; that the disease was abated; that if—it was a fearful if—his strength could be supported, she might still preserve him." This, with a reference to "a farther account, when any progress was made," was the whole of the letter. It was written with a trembling hand, and spoke but too evidently the effect that a fortnight's sorrow and watching had had on the writer.

Now it was that Rhoda felt more than ever the barrier between her and her friend; yet the more her desire to go to her was increased, the less did she dare to express it. She saw that the wish to gratify her almost triumphed over Sir James's fear for her safety.

"If you are so very uneasy, my dear Rhoda, we will at least approach nearer

to your friend. It seems to me that the disorder must be a fever. I know not that I have courage to expose you to its danger; but if the being at a less distance from the object of your anxiety will lessen it, *that* we may be without running any risk, and we can then act with more care, as circumstances arise."

Rhoda felt all the kindness of the proposal—she longed to accept it;—she hesitated:—but she felt that her approach would probably drive from the sick bed of Mr. Wyburg the sustaining presence of Mr. Ponsonby, and rob her friend of a support that she could not replace.

"And for whose sake shall I do all this?"—thought she: "for the sake of her who might, if she pleased, have been an integral part of this knot of friends.—No! I will not take from a happiness to which I refused to add."

Rhoda was ashamed to appear to act from motives which did not in reality actuate her conduct; yet how avow the real ground on which she declined an offer

so kind in itself, and so consonant to the first wish of her heart?—If the middle course which she held preserved the truth inviolate, there was enough of mystery in it to awaken anew all Sir James's indistinct suspicions of some secret inimical to his peace.

He had thus uneasy thoughts of his own to brood over; and lost in pursuit of that, which it would have been misery to him to have found, he was less than ever competent to console or exhilarate Rhoda.

Lord William was their mutual resource, and he became in consequence so domesticated in the cottage, that he was considered as one of the family. Rhoda felt his attractions, and his conversation became every day more and more necessary to her; and as she did so, she thought with less pain on her exclusion from the vicarage.

In the mean time the horizon in that quarter cleared up. Every post now brought accounts of the rapid convalescence of Mr. Wyburg, and of the re-

turning strength and renovated spirits of her friend. Rhoda could not, however, now hope that Miss Wyburg would be willing to separate herself so distantly from her father; or that so long a journey would be advisable for herself.—The period also for the residence in the Isle of Wight drew towards a close. Rhoda began to have had enough of the sublimity of the ocean: she began to talk of its *sameness*; her spirits had risen above the pitch of sentiment; the cottage began to be thought cold and inconvenient, —it was in danger of being pronounced black and disagreeable: she declared herself ready to accompany Sir James into Dorsetshire. Lord William saw the change with chagrin and mortification. He had already began to reckon upon the consequences of this growing favour with Rhoda; he had flattered himself that he had touched her heart, when he discovered that he was regarded as a more amusing companion than her husband. This was then no longer the moment to

push his advantages; he was aware that his point of influence was, for the present, at its height; and, like an able politician, withdrew, before Rhoda felt that it was upon the decline. He did not, however, withdraw in despair; he knew that the line of comparison between him and Sir James was made; he flattered himself that the time would come when Sir James would know it too: and from the growing dissatisfaction of both husband and wife, he promised himself the attainment of all that he desired.

"When will the days that are past return?" said he, with a sigh, as he bade Rhoda adieu.

"We shall meet in town," said Rhoda.

"In town!" repeated Lord William— "Shall I pity, or envy, those who know no difference between meeting in town, and upon these never-to-be-forgotten shores?"

It was long since Rhoda had heard such a turn of expression from Lord William; but she heard it not with plea-

sure. She replied with an air of gay indifference,—"These never-to-be-forgotten shores are not exempt from the original cause of all sublunary joys;— they become 'stale, flat, and unprofitable,' like others."

"There *are* joys that are never stale," replied Lord William;—"and may those joys be yours! Farewell!"

"Where," thought Rhoda, "where are the joys of which he speaks?—They must be seated in the heart!"—and the vicarage at Byrhley arose to her imagination. "Perhaps I may find them, too, at Osbourne Park!" said she, repressing with the thought a rising sigh: "I am sure that I ought!" and she felt again at ease.

CHAP. LI.

"My thoughts are vagabonds: all outward bound
'Midst sands, and rocks, and storms, to cruise for pleasure."
Young.

The experiment was soon made. A few days brought Sir James and Lady Osbourne to the spacious and elegant mansion of the former. It united the dignity of former times with the accommodations of the present; and if nature had not done much towards the beauty of the situation, art had well supplied her defects. Sir James's taste lay more in remedying deformity than in the perception of beauty; and while he dwelt with self-complacency on all that had been done, he forgot that there was still wanting what he could never do.

"How admirably the different levels are hid!" said he to Rhoda, pointing out

the exact spot where the two pieces of water *did not* join.—"By management, you see, that plantation absolutely looks like a wood—that was a little contrivance of my own. Those large trees have borne transplanting so well, that in a few years they will look as if they had never been any where else."

"But what was Osbourne Park before all this was done?" said Rhoda.

"I can scarcely tell you. I have been at work these twenty years, and I cannot distinctly point out all that it owes to my industry; but the whole is quite a different thing from what it was, and certainly more interesting to me than if I had found it all I wished, ready to my mind."

"Perhaps it may be to me in twenty years," replied Rhoda, smiling.

"Why, what does it want now?" said Sir James:—"I shall be delighted to follow any suggestions of yours. Something is certainly always to be done, to keep things as they are: but is there any

great improvement that you can point out?"

"My dear Sir James," said Rhoda, "I am sure you never made your works for me to mend—I, who never threw a pebble into a brook, to divert the stream from its natural channel, or removed a plant bigger than a cowslip or an orchis!"

"But your eye is so just," said Sir James, "and you are so fond of the beauties of nature, that I am sure a little habit in looking for what is amiss will enable you to suggest many improvements."

"I am an eager looker for beauties," said Rhoda; "but I turn away my eyes from faults, and forget them."

"Then I am afraid, my dear Rhoda, you will never make a place."

"But I can enjoy one that nature has made," said Rhoda.

"But do you see nothing here to enjoy?" said Sir James, with a little mortification in his tone.

"Oh! yes; a great deal. I really think, from what you say, that you must have

done wonders; and if you had not so candidly admitted me behind the scenes, I dare say I should have admired the place more, and you less," added she, laughing.

"Between the two," said Sir James, good humouredly, "I would certainly chuse to have the larger share of your admiration; but, notwithstanding, if you love me, you must love Osbourne Park also."

"The one is the consequence of the other," replied Rhoda; and it was not without an effort that she kept down the struggling sigh.

Sir James introduced Rhoda to the flower-garden, to the conservatory, to the menagerie:—all were well situated, and kept with neatness; but the want of real taste for their beauties and their products was evident in the scantiness of each. The gardener was to be applied to for the names of the plants; the poultry woman for the habits of the animals: they were the appendages of the place, not the enjoyment of its master.

"All this will be peculiarly your province, my dear Rhoda," said Sir James; "and will, I hope, be your peculiar delight."

"That I may delight in them," said Rhoda, "I must understand them. I wish you could have instructed me. I can never condescend that my gardener and my chicken woman shall be wiser in my pleasures than myself."

"They are both, however, I believe, skilful in their different departments," said Sir James; "and, till you are farther initiated, may be useful."

"I would rather have gone to school to you," said Rhoda; "all I know at present is, that I love flowers extremely. Pray, gardener, take care that I have a profusion of them all the seasons that I am here. I hope you can dress out the house for me, even now."

The gardener bowed, and said he would do his best.

"You will remember, my dear Rhoda," said Sir James, in an apologizing accent,

"that hitherto there has been no lady to dress the house for."

From the gardens and the park, Sir James and Rhoda extended their inspection to the farms and the cottages: the one appeared to be flourishing, and the other neat and comfortable. Sir James seemed to be respected by the farmers, and loved by the labourers; yet Rhoda thought there was wanted here that charm which at Temple Harcourt had seized so irresistibly on her imagination. If on comparison with Lord William, Sir James had lost estimation as a companion; here, when compared with Lord Randolf, he seemed equally to come short of the glory which might play around the brows of a landlord and a master. She knew not why: there was no want of kindness, no failure of graciousness; "but there is a grace, a manner," thought Rhoda, "without which, even goodness itself does not charm." She did not know that the want was in her perception, not in the object. She was not aware that it was the mellow

colouring of love, which melts all varying shades into beauty, which was wanting.

"To drive through parks and farms, to walk through gardens and conservatories, are *not* the joys that wear time," thought Rhoda.

But Rhoda's experiment in the constituent parts of happiness was not long confined to these.

Osbourne Park was situated in the midst of a numerous neighbourhood, chiefly consisting of persons of rank and fortune: all were emulous in testimonies of respect and esteem for Sir James, and all were eager to become known to Rhoda, of whose beauty and attractions all had heard; and to whom many of them had been introduced during her residence in London.

Rhoda now, for the first time, felt all the fulness of satisfaction that can be derived from situation alone.

She beheld herself at once the object of admiration and deference; she felt that she was the dispenser of happiness, and

the arbitress of pleasure.' Her power was almost the power of fairyism. Her wish was fruition. Gay as the sun, and light as a feather, she made the charm of all around her—not eclipsed, as in town, by higher rank or larger fortune, or sharing with her equals the tribute of accidental flattery, but as making the first figure in every society that she entered; if not absolutely of right, yet by courtesy, arising from her novelty, her resplendent beauty, and still more from the liberality, with which, like the sun, she diffused her blessings to all around her. With frank communicativeness, her house, her equipage, her time, her talents, were at the disposal of all whom she called her friends; and she called all her friends who approached her. Being in this point equally distant from the worldly and ill-tempered spirit which dictated the distinctions of Lady Morris, and the well-principled and dignified discrimination of Lady Randolf. She would drive with one party twenty miles in a morning to see any thing or

nothing; and would return to meet another at dinner; while she would entertain a third through the evening with a ball or a concert. She seemed to electrify the whole neighbourhood. All was emulative gaiety.

Sir James looked on with a kind of painful admiration—vain of the possession of so bright a jewel, yet fearing every moment its diminishing lustre.

The hours of their being together apart from others were, as in London, but few; but these were not, as in London, saddened by the passive or abstracted looks of Rhoda. Osbourne Park was the scene of all her pleasures; not merely the goal from whence she started in pursuit of them.

"You were right, my dear Sir James," would she say: "Osbourne Park is a delightful place; and had we but time, might be made a thousand degrees more delightful. It would only be removing the flower-garden; joining the conservatory to the house; enlarging the mena-

gerie; and scattering a few picturesque cottages towards the northern entrance of the park, which, Lady Emily observed the other day, had something too much of solitude in its appearance."

"Your taste for improvement," said Sir James, smiling, "is rapidly advanced."

"Lady Emily has inspired me," returned Rhoda: "she is always suggesting something or other."

"We will do all this, or any thing, my dear Rhoda, that we may be together," said Sir James.

"Are we not always together?" said Rhoda.

"Not exclusively so," returned Sir James.

"Oh! no; not exclusively: that would be curmudgeon."

"I would give *much*," replied Sir James, "to others, but not all. Now, even now, I want your undivided attention. Can you give me one half hour, just to look at an alteration which is making in the sweep of the walk, that you

said the other day to Lady Emily, you thought too abrupt?"

"Not now, my love! not now!" said Rhoda, playfully.

"Come away, come away,
"Youth and pleasure will not stay."

"Nor nineteen and five-and-forty go the same pace," thought Sir James: "this is the consequence of too late a matrimony."

But Rhoda made no such reflection. In this inauspicious moment, this moment which seemed to realize all her calculations of what is good in life, Sir James had no deficiencies in her eyes. From him she held that power which she had used so much to her gratification; and it seemed to extend to objects apparently the most out of its reach;—for as if there was to be nothing wanting in the delights of Osbourne Park, she believed that she had there found that firm, that kindred soul, which, from the intervention of circumstances, she had lost the enjoyment of in Lady Randolf and Miss Wyburg.

Lady Emily Grantham had just that seniority, with respect to Rhoda, which, without destroying the equality of age to all companionable purposes, justified Rhoda in her wish to consider her as a guide: with beauty that might have made all other means of charming needless, Lady Emily had manners the most prepossessing. High-born, and high-bred, her natural talents had been cultivated with the most assiduous care, and those, who had conducted her education, had reason to be satisfied with the success of their efforts; all that had been attempted to be taught her, she had acquired almost to perfection. She moved and danced with grace; she sung with taste and skill; she was an admirable musician, and painted, both in water colours and oils, almost with the science of an artist; she spoke French with the facility and accuracy of her native tongue, and repeated Italian poetry in tones as mellifluous as if she had been born in Rome. These were the serious labours of her mind; for her

lighter hours, she had various ways of giving wings to time:—she took off impressions from seals in more ways than any of her acquaintance; she could furnish her own repository, and the repositories of every other fashionable beggar, with a greater variety of elegant toys than any body besides; her fancy was unrivalled in uniforms, and orders of merit for all the ladies' schools in the neighbourhood; and she made shoes better than the most renowned shoemaker in Bond-street.

Nor had the heart been less attended to than the head and the hands; she had all the moral of sentiment, all the benevolence of fashion, all the good nature of politeness, all the virtue of honour. Her excess of candour was such, that where vice was evident and avowed, she supposed every virtue; and her zeal for truth so great, that she stript the most respectable characters of the most genuine virtues, that she might detect their hypocrisy.

Lady Emily was a wife and a mother;

and as she was the best-bred of wives, so she was the most careful and indulgent of mothers. The word *No*, as addressed to Mr. Grantham, was never heard from her lips by any ears but his own; and while she never permitted any transgression against the laws of good breeding or the forms of elegance to pass unreproved in her children, she thought no trouble heavy, nor time mispent, that could contribute to the display of their diminutive persons, or which could gratify their desire of being admired. If the bashfulness which occasioned the song to be ill sung, or the verse to be ill-repeated, did not escape without punishment, neither did the self-possession, which, at six years old, enabled the little Emily to perform the civilities of society with the ease and grace of five-and-twenty, go without its reward.

"You won my heart, my dear Emily," would this tender mother say, "by the manner in which you gave Mrs. Sydney her shawl; you have won the bracelet,—

that graceful little arm deserves to wear it. Harriet, my dear, you hold up your head so beautifully that I must tie this necklace about your pretty white neck. —I shall give Caroline nothing:—she blushes and stammers when she is spoken to."

"This is not quite the manner in which Lady Randolf trains the infant minds of *her* children," thought Rhoda; "but there is nothing wrong in it: civility is a moral virtue, and that which must be done daily, it is desirable should be done well. Lady Randolf herself cannot say more against pride, or vanity; indeed, I never heard her say so much; and I am sure there is nothing that Lady Emily would punish more severely than insolence and rudeness."

With the same kind of sophistry, Rhoda could gloss over all those faulty parts in Lady Emily's character and conduct which her acuteness and discrimination made it impossible that she should not see.

"We must allow different people to

take different views of the same object," would she say. "If the end be right, the means of pursuing it may innocently vary. It is not possible that any woman can have more at heart the interest of her children than Lady Emily; and certainly she and Mr. Grantham are very happy—not exactly the species of happiness that there is between Lord and Lady Randolf; *they* seem to have but one soul between them: but we might as reasonably expect that every face should be alike, as that every body should be happy in the same way. Lady Emily has seen more of the world than ever Lady Randolf, and with equal averseness from all that is wrong, she seems to me to know better the art of living in it.—How much is she loved and praised by all who know her! She will have more imitators than Lady Randolf; she will therefore do more good. I always feared that I could not be a second Lady Randolf; perhaps I may be another Lady Emily."

The secret of all this laboured attempt to deceive her understanding was nothing more than that Rhoda was dazzled by the talents and acquirements of Lady Emily, and flattered by the affection and deference with which she treated her: but her new friend had already done her an important injury. By inducing her to lower her standard of excellence, she had diminished her desire to excel; and by taking Lady Emily as her model, Rhoda had engaged herself to defend all that Lady Emily did as right.

CHAP. LII.

" He loves thee, and thou dost neglect him.—
——Blunt not his love,
Nor lose the good advantage of his grace
By seeming cold, or careless of his will."

Shakspeare.

LADY Emily and Rhoda soon became inseparable, and Lady Emily obtained so absolute a dominion over the mind of Rhoda, that she could scarcely be said to *think*, but as she dictated.

At her suggestion, and according to her plans, the alterations and improvements, the building up and pulling down of all that was (as Lady Emily settled it) within Rhoda's *own* territory, was hastily begun.

If Sir James, who was at first delighted with the interest that Rhoda

seemed now to take in the place, would have mingled his opinions with their schemes, or sought to communicate with Rhoda upon their prosecution, Lady Emily would cry;—"No, no, my dear Sir James! you must have nothing to do here—all this is Lady Osbourne's. Look to your park, look to your park, and your woods, and your waters; we will not attempt to rob you of any glory there; but *here*, we must have all the honour, or all the shame!"

"But I should like it better, if Sir James approved it," whispered Rhoda to Lady Emily.

"Oh, then, pray do it together;—I have done. All I wish is that you should please yourself."

"Why should we not take Sir James into our counsels?" said Rhoda.

"You may, my dear; but I beg to be excused:—I know the sex pretty well:—If Sir James can have to say that he put in a single twig, he will claim the honour of the whole creation, just as the critic

served a poor friend of mine; he restored the important words, *for*, and *and*, to their right places, and had credit for all the wit and talent which distinguished her ingenious work."

"But I think that I ought to have Sir James's express permission for some parts of what you propose should be done: it will be expensive, and if he should not like it when it is done——"

"His permission! to be sure, my dear; but I thought you had it.—Oh, I had no notion that you were a *booty* man and wife.—Pray ask his leave; I won't stir a step without it.—Sir James, Lady Osbourne says that if you are not consulted, you won't let her do all that she has a mind to."

"I think your ladyship must have misunderstood Lady Osbourne," said Sir James; "she could scarcely *mean* so. She knows that I wish nothing so much as that she should do whatever she likes;—and like what I do.

"There,—there's *carte blanche*," said

Lady Emily; "now you will have both your wishes, Sir James.—Lady Osbourne will do what she likes, and I can assure you that she likes all that you do. Don't you, Lady Osbourne?"

"I should be very ungrateful if I did not," said Rhoda.

Lady Emily having thus drawn a partition wall, as it were, between the pleasures of Sir James and Rhoda, possessed herself entirely of the imagination and confidence of the latter. The hours, that could be spared from general society, were spent by the two ladies in the occupation which they had created for themselves; and the nights of this society were sometimes encroached upon by the peculiar and appropriate interest which there seemed to be between them.

Rhoda's mind was genuinely engrossed by an amusement so entirely new to her; and Lady Emily encouraged an enthusiasm, which gave her such complete command over the mind of Rhoda.

Nor was this the only subject in which

the two friends found a mutual interest. Rhoda had discovered, with much pleasure, that Lord William St. Quintin was nearly related to Lady Emily, and as the gratification, which she had receved from his society in the Isle of Wight, was fresh in her memory, she naturally referred frequently, and with much commendation, to what he had said and done upon such and such occasions. Lady Emily was still more fervent in his panegyric: but she mingled her praises with many expressions of compassion; and many hints that he, who so much promoted the happiness of others, was not happy himself. If Rhoda seemed to wait for any explanation of these hints, Lady Emily grew discreet, or would refer Rhoda to what she must have heard in the world, of some unpleasant circumstances that had occurred in his family connexions; "Of which, upon my word," she would add, "I know no particulars; but I know they have gone very near his heart; and, I fear, have not left his for-

ture quite untouched; nor am I without apprehension that some fresh evil may have occurred; for he was to have been with us at this very time, and he writes me word that he *dare* not come;—what he can mean by such a word, I cannot conjecture, but it can indicate no good."

With so much to say to each other, in which they did not wish any body else to partake, the two ladies secluded themselves as much as possible; and in the mean time Sir James found himself almost as much alone, as if he had not been married.

Rhoda, it is true, graced the head of his table, and did the honours of his drawing-room, with equal dignity and ease;—it was she who gave the tone and the charm to society—gay, without coquetry—fond of admiration, yet not the dupe of flattery;—gracious to all, distinguishing none: the satisfaction of her heart looking out at her eyes, and a consciousness of its sense, marked by the complacency and good humour with

which she either listened to or addressed Sir James. He felt that he had nothing to fear, and wondered why he had any thing to wish; or why, in a society so constituted to satisfy every social disposition, he should find himself alone.

Rhoda never suspected that he did so. Pleased herself, and wanting nothing Sir James could give, she believed him to be as well satisfied as herself; and she would at this period have said of her union with Sir James, as she said of that of Lady Emily and Mr. Grantham, that it was very happy.

Every passing hour, however, increased the dreariness of Sir James's feelings; and the conviction that he had no share in the heart of Rhoda.

The peculiar pleasure which she had taken in the conversation of Lord William during their residence in the Isle of Wight, in contradistinction to any interest which he was able to excite, had first awakened this painful fear:—the general amusement which she seemed to derive

from all but him, at Osbourne Park, confirmed it.

"Did she love, she would feel as I do," said he to himself; "she can love—I am persuaded that she has loved. The friendship, which she now entertains for Lady Emily, is a more vivid affection than any that I have been able to awake in her bosom: she is more unreserved in her opinions when she is speaking to her; she adopts her taste more readily; she has a greater deference for her judgment; she is uneasy if she passes a day without her;—while the hours in which we are apart accumulate unnumbered and unremarked.

"I sought a confidant, and a friend:—I have gained—not even a companion! She is the ornament of my house, not the sharer of my bosom; she neither participates in my joys, nor soothes my sorrows.—Yet of what can I complain?—She is innocent and amiable; and if I do not make her happiness, I furnish the means that do."

Sir James endeavoured to lower the tone of his wishes to what he now saw was the only probable attainable good; and he endeavoured by unlimited indulgence, and by unclouded good humour, not to lessen the claim that he had, at least, to her gratitude.

Rhoda, engrossed by her new friend, by her new occupations, and by the duties and pleasures of society, was unconscious of the corroding thoughts that wore away, hour by hour, the happiness of Sir James; and which often, in spite of his resolution to the contrary, clouded his brow, and sometimes broke out in the murmurings of discontent.

"This is not the life, Rhoda," said he, one day to her, "with which you were so enchanted at Temple Harcourt. Lady Emily is not the prototype which you then proposed to copy."

"Do you wish my life to be any thing but what it is?" said Rhoda, looking very grave. "Is there any thing in Lady Emily to find fault with?"

"I have already told you," said Sir James, "that I wish to have you more to myself; and I acknowledge that I would rather you copied a woman who loves her husband than one who does not."

"Does not Lady Emily love Mr. Grantham?" said Rhoda, with the cold tone of reproachful incredulity.

"Certainly not," said Sir James: "she will herself hardly pretend to it. But what is more surprising, Mr. Grantham does not love Lady Emily. Think, Rhoda, what must be the counterbalances of character, that can outweigh the powers of charming in so lovely a creature."

Rhoda felt the admonition; but she felt it resentingly.

"The fault, I should suppose, must be wholly Mr. Grantham's," said she.

"That Mr. Grantham is without faults," replied Sir James, "I will not undertake to say; but I know of none that he was ever guilty of with respect to Lady

Emily, unless, perhaps, too indiscriminate indulgence."

"Is it possible," said Rhoda, "that indulgence can be a fault?"

"If it is not met by a generous mind," replied Sir James, "it may be the cause of faults."

"But here," said Rhoda, "it could not be prejudicial: there is not a more generous spirit breathing than Lady Emily's."

"Lady Emily," said Sir James, calmly, "has very superior talents; but she has more talent than intellect, and more intellect than heart."

"I think you judge of her harshly," said Rhoda, warmly.

"It is not now that I first judge of Lady Emily," returned Sir James:—"But granting her all the merit that you see in her, she is yet deficient in one point, which, I confess, in my estimation, outweighs all the rest. Her virtues, whatever they may be, are always exerted apart

from Mr. Grantham's, sometimes in opposition. I would have the good qualities of man and wife, like their affections, or their property, one common stock."

"There is something sweet in that thought!" said Rhoda. "But, my dear Sir James, you cannot deny Lady Emily's superiority to Mr. Grantham. Would you have her lower herself to his level?"

"No. Allowing the superiority, which, if you knew both better, you would see you had placed wrongly, I would have her raise him to hers."

"Surely, nothing can be more obliging than Lady Emily's manners to Mr. Grantham," said Rhoda.

"Nor less wife-like," replied Sir James. "Did you ever hear her say *we* in your life? It is *my* poor, *my* plan, *my* way;—and then the frequent disclaimings that she makes of any interference with, or knowledge of any of Mr. Grantham's pursuits, or designs! They seem to have nothing in common, but their name."

Rhoda sat silent;—she sat ruminating how much of these observations were applicable to herself; at length she said, —"Is there not something captious in such objections to a character of such sterling worth, and brilliant parts as Lady Emily?"

"I much doubt her sterling worth," returned Sir James; "and her brilliant parts only make her failings the more dangerous: nor can there be scarcely any failings more inimical to married happiness than those which I have pointed out."

"I am very unfortunate," said Rhoda, a little peevishly, "that the only person, whom I have particularly liked since I was married, should be so disagreeable to you; and the happiest part of that period to me should have been to you the least happy."

"Don't take the matter so seriously," said Sir James; "I am sure the means of being mutually happy are in our hands: we have only to take care to use them."

I thought that I had done so," replied Rhoda, " by making your friends mine; and by shewing the sense I have of your generosity, by making others partakers of it."

" I would have no such word as that which you have just used come between us, said Sir James:—I would, if possible, identify myself with you."

Rhoda was vexed, and answered perversely, " All this lecturing does not savour much of equality."

" I have done," said Sir James; and turned from her.

" Oh! pardon, pardon! Pray forgive me!" cried Rhoda. " It is my constitution to offend, and to repent;—all my friends know it, and tolerate me accordingly."

Sir James took Rhoda's offered hand, and pressed it between his; but with less cordiality than she could have wished. She saw, that with him, offences would not be written in sand, to be effaced by the next returning flood of kindness.

"Is it to be ever thus?" thought she: "Are my pleasures and those of Sir James never to be the same?" Then reviewing the whole of her married life:—"The dissipation of London wearied me," said she; "and my London *home* was a blank. I was charmed with the beauties and sublimities of nature in the Isle of Wight; but Sir James had no taste for them: yet Lord William St. Quintin could understand me. Osbourne Park, when first I saw it, appeared to me artificial, dressed, uninteresting!—I was sorry; for I saw that Sir James was mortified. But no sooner do I become pleased with it myself, no sooner do I make myself an occupation in adorning it, than Sir James grows dissatisfied, complains that our pleasures are distinct, and even betrays jealousy of a female friend. When I supposed that he would have been happy in my happiness, gay in my gaiety, flattered by the praises bestowed upon me, I find him claiming me as a property in which

nobody else is to have a share; and warning me how the faults of character may break the charm of beauty. Who is to blame for all this? Sir James, or myself? He loves me—all that I do ought to be pleasing in his eyes.—Do I love him?" Rhoda durst pursue her catechism no farther :—she felt the weight of claims which she was unable to answer.

"Neither are the joys of society those which never tire," said she. "Is, then, all of this life vanity and vexation of spirit?"

CHAP. LIII.

> "Oh thou delicate fiend!
> Who is't can read a woman?"
>
> *Shakspeare.*

Rhoda wore a saddened aspect, when next she saw her friend, Lady Emily.

"My sweet friend, are you not well?"

"Yes, very well; thank you."

"How then?—What obscures the sunshine of that dear countenance?"

"Every body has chagrins."

"My dear Rhoda can have none;—she is, or she deserves to be, the happiest of the happy."

"What, in your opinion, constitutes happiness?" said Rhoda.

"Youth, beauty, fortune, admiration!"

"Are these *all* the requisites?" asked Rhoda. "Is there nothing that can counteract their power of giving happiness?"

"Scarcely," said Lady Emily; "if we add the knowledge how to make use of them."

"Can you teach me that knowledge?"

"What is the matter with you, my dear?" said Lady Emily: "something vexes you. Pour out your sorrows into the heart of friendship; for, after all, a true friend is worth youth, beauty, fortune, and admiration altogether."

"Can a married woman have any other friend besides her husband?" said Rhoda.

"My dear!" said Lady Emily, looking at her with the best acted surprise:—then, as if a moment's pause had been sufficient to let her into the whole truth, "Oh, I see how it is," added she: "Sir James does not like the tenderness of our friendship. Ah, I thought that Sir James could forget and forgive: I did not know that he bore malice."

"Malice!—To whom?" said Rhoda.

"Oh, you know very well:—for some of my past offences."

"I did not know that you had ever committed any against Sir James."

"Oh, yes, you do; it is an old story: I am sure you must have heard it; and if you have not, I am sure it is not worth hearing."

"To me it is extremely worth hearing," replied Rhoda, "who wish that two persons whom I love so much should love each other also."

"My dear Lady Osbourne, why should it be necessary to the enjoyment of our friendship, that Sir James and I should love one another?"

"His good opinion may," said Rhoda.

"His good opinion?" said Lady Emily, her eyes flashing fire: "Nay, there I defy him! What naughty things has he been telling you of me?"

"None, I do assure you," said Rhoda. "But if you are not equally acceptable to Sir James as you are to me, how can we

be so much together, as we should be, were it otherwise?"

"Acceptable to Sir James!" said Lady Emily, with great contempt. "Yes, I have been acceptable to Sir James; and I find he cannot forget that Sir James was not acceptable to me."

"I must know what you mean," said Rhoda, earnestly.

"With all my heart," said Lady Emily; "there is nothing to be told that I can wish unknown: however, I would have spared the vanity of Sir James. It is all told in a few words. A thousand years ago,—I suppose, my dear, before your bright eyes enlightened our lower sphere,—I might have filled the place which you now fill; I might have worn the jewels which you now wear; and I might have been controlled in the affections of my heart, as you are now controlled. It was all arranged by those who thought I was too young to have a will of my own; but I was not too young to know what I liked, and I did not like Sir James.—So

his fine place and finer jewels could not buy me."

Every word that Lady Emily uttered was a dagger to the heart of Rhoda.

> "Her eye was filled with tears
> That stifled feeling dared not shed,
> And changed her cheek from pale to red,
> And red to pale——"

"Do you suppose that they bought me?" said she.

"Oh, no! far from it. Of course you liked Sir James;—we are not all bound to like the same thing: and, therefore, pray, my dear, let you and me love on in spite of Sir James. It is a great deal better as it is than that he should like me too well; for then, who knows but that *you* might be jealous?"

"This story does, indeed, account for Sir James's prejudice to Lady Emily," thought Rhoda: "but there is no reason why I should love her less now, because Sir James has loved her more formerly. But here, again, is an insurmountable bar to Sir James and myself being pleased with the same object!"

"Come, clear that thoughtful brow, my dear Lady Osbourne," said Lady Emily; "or I see that you will throw away all your advantages for the want of that knowledge of which I spoke."

"I cannot believe," said Rhoda, "that youth, beauty, fortune, and admiration, *do* constitute happiness; and I would not wish to think that they did: for then, how short-lived must it be!"

"Oh, no; to be sure they don't: I spoke sportively to make you smile But am I not a wife, am I not a mother, am I not a friend?" said she, pressing Rhoda's hand between hers: "and do you think I leave the duties of life and the affections of the heart out of my definition?"

"Charming Lady Emily!" said Rhoda. "It is only necessary that all should see you as you are, for all to love you as I do!"

"I really believe," said Lady Emily, with the tone of the most bewitching candour, "that I often do myself injustice, because I can't talk in old saws

and moral sentences, and utter trite truths with the air of discovery; nor think it necessary at every moment to revert to first principles. I let my life preach for me; and there, I hope my sweet friend will never find any thing to reprove."

"I am confident that I never shall," said Rhoda; "and I hope I shall be able to tread in your steps."

"Oh, no!—you must tread in the steps that Sir James will like better," said Lady Emily; "it is your first duty. I assure you, that you would see me as precise and methodistical as Sir James could desire, if, happily, Mr. Grantham was not of another taste."

"Nay, my dear Lady Emily, Sir James is neither precise nor methodistical," said Rhoda; "I am sure that you don't think so."

"No matter what I think," said Lady Emily. "Sir James is one of the best sort of men in the world; and you like him, and love him; and he likes you, and

loves you; and you are the happiest people in the world, and I hope always will be."

Rhoda would have found it difficult to have said what there was in this panegyric that mortified her, but she was mortified. She found that she was not the object of envy she had supposed she must have been; and the very distinctions which, at the cost of her integrity and the hazard of her happiness, she had found it impossible to forego, lost their value in her eyes, when she discovered that they had been rejected by another, to whom even the experience of the want of them did not make them objects of regret.

"I must yield in greatness of mind to Lady Emily," thought she. But had Rhoda seen the original text upon which Lady Emily had given so ingenious a paraphrase, she would not, on this occasion, have been humiliated by a comparison with her friend.

The simple truth was this. Sir James had been attracted by the beauty of Lady Emily, when it was in its first bloom; he had been dazzled by the brilliancy of her talents; and had been induced to think of her as a wife, by the peculiarly sedulous education which he was told that she had received: but proceeding with his characteristic caution, he had not advanced beyond the possibility of a retreat, before the young lady and her friends had so completely unveiled the mercenary motives by which they were actuated that he suddenly stopt short in the pursuit, and suffered rather the report that he had been rejected to prevail, than to avow, or even to hazard being questioned, on the cause of the rupture of a connexion which seemed to be on the point of being completed.

Lady Emily had been taught by her mother to hate him ever since, and the very inferior establishment that waning hopes had occasioned her to form, some

years afterwards, had fixed this hatred as a principle in her very soul. The exaltation of Rhoda, an unknown country girl, without rank, without connexion, without fortune, to the very point which had been the height of her most ambitious hopes, opened afresh the stream of malevolence, which time, and the belief that Sir James was confirmedly an old bachelor, had nearly closed. What had been done by another, with better management, *she* might have done; she could hardly suppose more personal attractions than had failed in her own case. She longed to appreciate talents, which, from their effect, she estimated so highly. Her visits to London were by no means regular. Mr. Grantham's fortune was far from large, and could ill support a residence in the capital, with a wife so expensive, and so highly allied as Lady Emily, even once in four or five years. She had not been there at the period of Rhoda's marriage; but of her extraordinary charms she had heard from Lord William St.

Quintin, and she waited with much impatience for her arrival at Osbourne Park. The moment she beheld her, she saw, indeed, that "all out of door was most rich;" and when she found her frank, unmachinating, undesigning, she thought her alone, the "Arabian bird," and sickened with the happiness which she believed that the man, whom she hated, had secured his own. But not alone did she now hate him; she hated Rhoda also: and when, in the clear mirror of Rhoda's mind, she soon discovered the failings that had worked her destiny, and saw that Sir James's possession extended not to the heart of his fascinating wife; while she perceived, at the same time, that nothing less than this heart would satisfy him, she found in her hands sufficient means to "work them mickle woe."

CHAP. LIV.

"Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale.
A little shame hath spoilt the sweet world's taste,
That it yields nought but bitterness."

Shakspeare.

Rhoda, in the mean time, believed that she had more and more reason to love her new friend, when she saw her, with increased assiduity, seek to recommend herself to Sir James, and observed the caution, with which she suggested any plan without reference to his wishes.

"I had taken quite a different view of things," would she say; "I had imagined that you and Sir James would go on just like Mr. Grantham and myself; but it is not every man who likes his wife to be a free agent, and I am the last person in the

world to say a word against the duty of obedience. Heaven knows, when we marry we make ourselves poor dependent creatures!—It is only rarely that we see our lords willing to remit their rights; and then we hold our free will only at their pleasure."

"You quite misunderstand this matter," Rhoda would reply; "it is not that Sir James wishes to control my will, but that he would be flattered to find our tastes agree."

A graceful movement of the head, and a smile, were generally Lady Emily's answer, as if she had said, "a distinction without a difference, my dear."

But Rhoda felt the difference to be essential. Her principles were too sound, and her intellect too just, to allow of any repugnancy to a subordination for which she had voluntarily engaged; but in fulfilling her duty, she doubted whether she should secure her happiness; and the growing gravity of Sir James, even when she supposed that she was making hourly

sacrifices to his wishes, confirmed the doubt.

The soft indulgence, and gay good humour of Lady Emily, were compensations for the rigid brow and cold seriousness of Sir James, which Rhoda knew not how to forego; and she scarcely believed herself called upon to make such an offering to the happiness of one, who, she began to think, was not willing to make any to hers. The very desire that she should give up the friend whom she delighted in, she felt as a disobligation, that removed Sir James farther from her affections than he had ever been before. Insensibly there grew between them an estrangement, to the progress of which each had been equally inattentive, till they discovered, by the distance that was between them, the adverse movements which they had made. All familiarity of communication was gone. Sir James, with a bleeding heart, admitted the conviction that he was not, nor could hope to be loved by Rhoda; and Rhoda, with the irritating feelings of shame and

regret, was obliged to admit to herself that she had mistaken the road to happiness. She thought that she could die, rather than make the confession to any other; and yet, as she wept upon the bosom of her friend, the secret was every moment ready to escape her.

"I fear my dear Lady Osbourne is not so happy as I had believed?" would she say insidiously, as she soothed and caressed the dejected Rhoda. "Ah! I always feared that with your heart, with your talents,—but I am a fool. Come, let us walk, drive, plant, build, do any thing but cry. My dear Lady Osbourne, you may be happier *still* than nine parts of your sex out of ten; when the seasoning is over all will be well."

"Had I been wise like you——"

"Like me," replied Lady Emily, "you might have been mistaken. I, too, have had my seasoning; but let us not talk of it; it is past."

"Do you not love Mr. Grantham?" said Rhoda, with a tone of surprise, and

betraying at once the root of her *own* sorrow.

"My dear, that is a question which I have long ceased to ask myself. I assure you that I loved him as long as it was possible for mortal woman to love her very antipodes. When I found no more was to be done that way, it was a severe wrench to set my heart again in its right place, but resolution will do all. Mr. Grantham did not insist upon my liking every thing that he liked, and hating every thing that he hated; and you are witness, my dear, that if we do not contribute to each other's pleasures, neither do we add to each other's pains."

"Sir James is then right in one particular," thought Rhoda: "Lady Emily does not love Mr. Grantham."

"But having once loved Mr. Grantham," said Rhoda, "how could you cease to love him?"

"My dear Rhoda," said Lady Emily, kissing her forehead, "that's a question for a little miss of fifteen."

"But in your choice, you were not determined by any *circumstantial* consideration; you married *only* Mr. Grantham."

"To be sure I did!" said Lady Emily, proudly; "I should have scorned to have been purchased! But it is not only the jewels, with which we may wish to adorn our hair, that may deceive us by their lustre. Personal qualities may be fictitious equally with diamonds."

Rhoda was silent; she felt that *she had* been purchased.—Then, recovering herself; "If fancy and ambition may equally mislead," said she, "perhaps she is the wisest who is determined by the solid qualities of the mind and heart. These are honourable grounds for affection, and must always remain the same."

"You have found it so, my dear?" said Lady Emily, with a look of penetrating inquiry, that tinged Rhoda's cheek with a deeper red.

"It must be my disgrace if I have not," replied she, with her usual ingenuousness.

"Pray, my dear, don't be so ready to take disgrace to yourself. We can do but what we *can* do. Gold in the ore may be more valuable than when beaten into leaf; but the gilding is more pleasing to the eye."

"Oh!" said Rhoda, "it is the love of that gilding which ruins us all!"

Rhoda pondered over the fact, which she could no longer doubt, that Lady Emily did not love Mr. Grantham;—that Mr. Grantham did not love Lady Emily, she could as little hesitate to believe; but how could it be, that in ceasing to contribute to each other's happiness they had not incurred the evil of becoming a burthen to each other, she could not understand. Her unsophisticated feelings suggested to her all that truth and nature warrant of the wretchedness of an intimate connexion without affection;—of society without consonancy of taste;—of common interest, and individual pursuits.—Nor could Lady Emily's metaphorical sophistry persuade her that the heart which could

not ally itself with virtue and kindness was not itself wanting in one of these qualities.

Thus, sometimes arraigning, and at others acquitting herself; persuading herself that she ought to be happy, and feeling that she was not so, Rhoda lost all her natural gaiety; she became meditative and silent, yet dreaded to be alone; and sought, in the exertion of false spirits, to forget the habitual heaviness of her heart.

Lady Emily's society became indispensable to her. Without having undergone the mortification of a plenary confession, she was aware that her feelings were understood by her friend, and she derived hope for the future from this friend's repeated assurances that her present state of mind was but the crisis through which three-fourths of the married part of the sex passed to that state of calm indifference, and independent enjoyment, which was equally the consummation of having excited passion, or having felt it.

She affirmed that the time would come,

when she would be able to enjoy the good which she possessed, without so acutely thinking of the evil which accompanied it.

"Let no one," said this sapient counsellor, "suspect that you have miscalculated. It is not the actual riches which we possess, but those which we are believed to have, that make our happiness. Make others believe that you are happy, and the worst part of the matter is obviated."

"The worst part, surely," said Rhoda, "is that I cannot conceal from myself that I have miscalculated; and the next painful consideration is that I am not alone the sufferer."

"Oh! leave Sir James to the consequence of his own miscalculation; that's his own affair: at five-and-forty he ought to have known himself better than to have expected to have been the object of *la grande passion*. His vanity, my dear, was much less pardonable than your—aspirations, shall I call them? If you keep the

consequences of your mistake to yourself, the pain with you will pass away; but if you let the secret escape, the disgrace will never cease to be remembered."

"The disgrace!" thought Rhoda, and half resolved to become a hypocrite.

In prosecution of this half-formed plan, the balls and amusements became more frequent, and the company at Osbourne Park more and more numerous. Her own revels brought to her mind those of the last year at Overleigh Park. "I am more like Lady Morris than Lady Randolf," thought she; "and having sacrificed so much to obtain the means of emulating her, I neglect the end!—Oh! when shall I be wise?"

She certainly did not at this time take the proper measures to become so. The fear of its being known how grossly she had erred, kept her in the way of error; and her treacherous friend, Lady Emily, encouraged every step that she took in it. She had succeeded in making the exaltation, which she envied, uneasy to its pos-

sessor; and in destroying the happiness of Rhoda she knew that she aimed the most deadly blow at that of Sir James.

Nor was Sir James himself more disposed than Rhoda to take the world into his confidence, as to the mistake that *he* had made. Having lost all hope of domestic happiness, he endeavoured, in the distractions of promiscuous society, to lose the sense of his disappointment, and hoping to cover the little communion that was between himself and Rhoda, by the appearance of being united in their pleasures, he rather encouraged than checked every scheme of festivity, and every accumulation of company. But Sir James sighed over the splendid banquet, and Rhoda withdrew from the dance to ease her swelling heart by a flood of tears.

CHAP. LV.

> "By slow and silent, but resistless sap,
> In his pale progress gently gaining ground,
> Death urged his deadly siege, in spite of art,
> Of all the balmy blessings nature lends,
> To succour frail humanity."
>
> *Young.*

From this scene of melancholy festivity, they were both called by a summons to attend upon Mrs. Strictland. She and Mr. Strictland had promised to join their friends at Osbourne Park on their return from the Isle of Wight. Repeated indisposition had been the alleged cause for the repeated violation of this promise; but Mrs. Strictland had neither felt herself, nor communicated to the mind of Rhoda, any alarm, as to the nature or the event of her illness. A cold—

a cough—debility was the extent of the malady; while, on the other hand, she was every other post "better;" "almost well;" "wanted only to be witness to her dear Rhoda's happiness, and to experience her kindness to be quite so;"—should "set out Tuesday;" "Thursday;" "certainly the Monday following:"—but the appointed days came and went, and still she was unable to begin her journey.

At length came the fatal mandate! If Rhoda would receive the last adieus of her maternal friend, she must not lose a moment in returning to London:—her lungs were affected,—were gone; and the physicians would not answer for her life a week.

In the present desolate state of Rhoda's mind, the threatened loss of Mrs. Strickland seemed to rob her of half her interest in existence. She had hoped from her society and her counsel some mitigation of her chagrins. She was the only person to whom she could, without a blush, pour out her whole heart. To

Frances she had long ceased to write confidentially; and to have revealed to Lady Randolf the consequence of that dereliction from all which she knew that Lady Randolf approved, would have been to have inflicted on herself a severer pang than any she had yet experienced. But she felt that she had a right to communicate to Mrs. Strictland a share of the disappointment, which in part she owed to her avarice and influence; and of which she hoped that she might suggest some means to soften the bitterness.

Nothing appeared so strange to the inexperienced mind of Rhoda, as that a person, whom she had left only a few weeks ago in perfect health, on whose cheek the bloom of youth had scarcely faded, should die!—Her astonishment was nearly equal to her grief; and while she trembled lest the event had already taken place, she repeated, every moment, "It cannot be!"

The involuntary reliance that she had upon the kindness and indulgence of Sir

James, made Rhoda, in this moment of distress, cling to him as to her best support; while Sir James, losing in the softness of compassion for her affliction all sense of her late offences, forgot that there had been estrangement between them; and had no thought but how best to gratify her wishes, and to console her sorrow.

Rhoda, fondly hanging on her husband's arm and weeping on his shoulder, while he clasped her to his heart with all the warmth of the first opening tide of love, was a sight from which Lady Emily turned aside, as did the fallen angel from the bliss of our first parents in paradise.

"Be consoled—be comforted, my Rhoda," said Sir James. "You can never be friendless!"

"Oh never, never, while *you* are with me!" said Rhoda. And Sir James thought himself the happiest of men.

In the gratitude of Rhoda, in the affectionate kindness of Sir James, Lady Emily beheld the counteraction of all her mischievous plans.—"Will they now escape

me ?" thought she, with the pang of baffled malice.

"Farewel, my dear Lady Osbourne!" said she. "In such a moment as this, I cannot hope to be remembered. But, till we meet again, I shall think only of you!"

Rhoda wept, and could not speak; but suffered Lady Emily to press her hand to her heart; and still clinging to Sir James, he put her into the carriage and drove away.

On their arrival in Grosvenor-square, Rhoda hung back in silence, lest she should catch, even from the glanee of the footman's eyc, a confirmation of all her fears. But at the sound of the word "better," given in answer to Sir James's enquiry, she felt as if restored to every hope; and springing from the carriage into the house, she was met by her solemn cousin, whose funereal face struck her again into despair.

"Don't terrify me,—pray don't terrify me!" said she. "Tell me that she is better!"

Mr. Strictland shook his head.

"Where is Wilson?—Let me see Wilson.—I am sure she will be more comfortable."

Wilson obeyed the summons, and proved that she had not forgotten her old trade.

"Tell me," said Rhoda, "that Mrs. Strictland is better."

"She *is* better," replied Wilson. "Mr. Strictland lets the doctors fright him out of his wits. But surely I, who watch my lady night and day, must know best. And now you, madam, are come, I am sure she will be well."

Rhoda desired that she might be admitted directly to Mrs. Strictland; and after a little prudent precaution, the request was complied with.

Rhoda had not pictured to herself the possibility of the change which had taken place in the features and figure of Mrs. Strictland.—She cast her eyes upon her, and, covering her face with her hands, stood still in silent agony.

"Don't—don't do so, my lady," whis-

pered Wilson. "Does not Mrs. Strictland look better than you expected, my lady?" said she, aloud.

"My dear, dear friend!" said Rhoda.

"Rhoda never did flatter," said Mrs. Strictland, in a tone of hollowness which made Rhoda start. "But, my love, I really am better. Wilson will tell you of half a dozen instances of much worse cases than mine, which all ended in perfect recovery."

Rhoda was now weeping violently, in spite of her endeavours to suppress her emotion.

"I am so glad to see you," said she, in broken accents. "But so surprised! so pained!—Oh! why did you not let me come sooner?"

"I hope," says Mrs. Strictland, "that you are come to see me amend every day. That would not have been the case if you had come sooner."

"Oh! yes; I hope so," said Rhoda, endeavouring to regain her self-possession. And this she not only did, in a little time,

but even began to partake of the belief, so confidently affirmed by Wilson, that Mrs. Strictland would be well :—an opinion that Mrs. Strictland herself appeared strongly to entertain.

The two or three succeeding days seemed to justify those hopes. Mrs. Strictland declared that she was quite a new creature since Rhoda had been with her; and Rhoda, with the sanguine spirit of youth and inexperience, believed all she wished, and almost dismissed every fear.

"Your case would be perfect," said Rhoda, "if you could get out of this thick and choking air: it is that which affects your breath so. You must remove to Brompton. I will speak to Mr. Strictland, and we will go to-morrow."

"It is what I long for," said Mrs. Strictland; "but you will find it difficult to persuade Mr. Strictland. He says it is unnecessary; that I shall get well here. I know what he means: he is afraid of the expense."

"Then I will speak to Sir James," said Rhoda, "and have nothing to do with Mr. Strictland: Sir James will fear no expense that will gratify me."

"Dearest Rhoda," said Mrs. Strictland, "now you repay all the pains that I took to marry you to Sir James."

"Took pains?" repeated Rhoda. "Ah, madam!"—and the note of complaint was bursting from her lips, but the consideration of Mrs. Strictland's weak state checked her.

"Yes, yes!—I may make the confession now," returned Mrs. Strictland. "Your little proud heart, though it would have refused to have assisted me in securing the prize, will not refuse to rejoice in the possession."

With her spirits damped by this little conversation, Rhoda applied to Mr. Strictland, desiring that he would immediately take lodgings at Brompton, to which Mrs. Strictland and herself might remove without delay.

Mr. Strictland urged the inutility of

such a measure; the fatigues that Mrs. Strictland would incur; and at length affirmed, in explicit terms, upon the credit of the physicians, that nothing could save Mrs. Strictland.

Rhoda, disgusted and irritated, turned from him in anger; and calling her footman, walked, without a moment's delay, to her own house; where Sir James, from want of accommodation at Mr. Strictland's, slept.

There, if she did not find a more credulous auditor, she found a much more indulgent one.

Sir James, while, with a prudent care for the future, he warned her against entertaining a too confident hope, fully agreed with her as to the expediency of leaving no measures untried that might by possibility contribute to Mrs. Strictland's recovery, or even to the gratification of her wishes.—With a prompt kindness he met her proposal of going directly with her to Brompton; and he assisted so effectually in clearing all diffi-

culties that occurred in their pursuit after lodgings, that she returned in a few hours to Mrs. Strictland with information that every thing would be ready, for her reception at Brompton, the day following, at any hour when she could be best able to remove.

Mrs. Strictland blessed the active kindness of Rhoda; and with the strength that the prosecution of a favourite wish sometimes gives, even to the lowest state of debility, declared she should be ready to make the little journey whenever Rhoda thought best.

Rhoda disposed all with good sense and adroitness; and she found in Wilson so clever and attentive an assistant in all her plans, that she forgot the aversion which she used to entertain for her, and gave her full credit for the affection she professed, and which she, at this time, so kindly manifested towards Mrs. Strictland.

By the united efforts of Rhoda and Mrs. Wilson, Mrs. Strictland's removal was accomplished without any inconve-

nience or evil consequence; and she had not been two days at Brompton, before she was so much amended, that Sir James partook in some measure of the hopes of Rhoda; and Mr. Strictland himself was compelled to admit that the wisest physicians were sometimes mistaken.

Both he and Sir James remained in town, only occasionally visiting Brompton. The latter, however, was much the more assiduous and constant visitor of the two.

More beautiful, more brilliant, more adorned, he might in gayer hours have seen Rhoda; but never had he seen her more amiable or more attractive.

Wrapt in her simple morning dress, her lovely features shaded with the broad lace of her large cap, he would often find her, at a late hour in the day, administering to the wants and wishes of Mrs. Strictland, after having passed the night by her bed-side, careless of her own accommodation, and often forgetful even of necessary refreshment.

Sir James's tenderness was alarmed. He begged for a remission of such fatiguing exertions.

"I cannot relax my attentions," said Rhoda. "Wilson and I shall restore her between us, in spite of all the raven prognostics of the physicians. But Wilson would sink under her attendance if I did not assist. There is much that she can do which I cannot. What you see me do, I am fully equal to. It is indeed my food, my rest. I should droop, I should fail, if I were to do less."

"I would almost exchange places with Mrs. Strictland," said Sir James, "to be the object of such love!"

Rhoda could only be silent. To such appeals, her heart said nothing; and never were the words and feelings of Rhoda at variance.

To the surprise of the medical attendants some weeks passed without any rapid approach of that event, which they still declared to be inevitable. It seemed as if the protecting arm of Rhoda warded off

the dart of death; yet hope rather diminished than increased in her breast. By accurately observing the symptoms of the disease, and by comparing periods, she was at length but too painfully persuaded that no progress towards recovery was made; she could no longer be misled by the confident assertions of Wilson, nor blinded to the real state of what passed under her own eyes.

Her endeavours had been hitherto directed to amuse the mind of her friend, as well as to contribute to the ease of her person; and for this purpose she had given into every light thought or frivolous pursuit that had arisen either from Mrs. Strictland herself, or that had been suggested by Wilson. The pleasures and cares of dress were still the paramount occupation of Mrs. Strictland's mind; the knowledge of all that was passing in the world was the next in degree of interest: to the gratification of both she could not have had a more able

administrator than Mrs. Wilson; and Rhoda found her own weariness of such subjects superseded by the desire that she had to contribute to the amusement of her friend. But when she saw from day to day the shrinking muscles baffle even the skill of Mrs. Wilson to give the newly invented wrapping gown the intended flow, and the increasing hollow of the cheek, and deepening yellow of the complexion, mock all attempts in the form of the head-dress and the tint of the ribbon, to shade the one or illustrate the other; she recoiled from the vain attempt to make death lovely, and asked herself, "whether it was thus an immortal spirit was to prepare to present itself at the throne of its Creator?"

"I beg," said she to Wilson, "that we may have no more idle stories of what is passing without; let me hear no more of new dresses, nor of the becomingness of that cap; nor of the gracefulness of that gown. Alas! I see how all must end,

and it is cruelty to engage Mrs. Strictland's thoughts on such frivolous subjects."

"Bless me, my lady," said Wilson, "you would not talk to Mrs. Strictland of death, would you?"

"Why not? It is what she must soon undergo."

"Let it come when it will, it will come too soon," replied Mrs. Wilson; "and if you say one word of dying, you will kill her instantly. How have I kept her alive so long, but by telling her that she would not die?"

"While I had hope myself," said Rhoda, "I wished to communicate it to her; but I have lost all hopes, and I would not deceive her for a thousand worlds."

"Dear, my lady, there is no harm in deceiving her for her good."

"For her good!" said Rhoda, shuddering; and she moved towards Mrs. Strictland's room, with the intention, from that hour, to take every opportunity which of-

fered, of gently leading Mrs. Strictland's thoughts into a new train.

She found her arranging some part of her dress, which Wilson had left with her, for the purpose, as she said, of amusing her.

"Oh! I am glad that you are come," said she, in a tone of voice which seemed more deep and feeble than Rhoda had ever yet heard; "I cannot manage this, I am sure.—Let Wilson say what she will, I *do* grow weaker. Don't you think so?"

Rhoda took the emaciated hand which dropt, from mere weakness, the piece of lace which she meant to have given to Rhoda; she kissed it, pressed it to her heart, and again kissed it.

"Lady Osbourne! Rhoda!" said Mrs. Strictland, with affright; "Do I look worse? Do you perceive any alteration? Call Wilson; Wilson always comforts me."

"I would comfort you if I could," said Rhoda; "but if you really do feel yourself to grow weaker,——"

"Don't! don't!" said Mrs. Strictland, with a voice almost of suffocation; "Oh! Wilson, are you there? Give me some drops. Lady Osbourne thinks I am worse; she thinks I am altered."

"Dear, dear madam," said Wilson, drawing the curtain differently, "it is only the strange light which this frightful coloured curtain throws upon you. There! Now I am sure you look better than you have done any day this week; don't you think so, my lady?"

Rhoda was silent.

"No! I see that Rhoda does *not* think so," said Mrs. Strictland; "and if—— there is one thing—I could never before bring myself to mention it—but if—my dearest Rhoda, promise me if—I mean if Wilson should ever want a place—Mr. Strictland will do nothing for her—I can do nothing—promise me that you will take her; you see how faithful a creature she is, and how affectionate.—"

Wilson was now sobbing, with her handkerchief up to her eyes.

"She will be invaluable to you; I can never repay half the money that she has saved me in my dress. Do say that she shall live with you, if——"

"If Wilson wants my protection," said Rhoda, "she shall have it."

"Oh! my dearest ladies," cried Wilson, "how good!—But I should be miserable if I did not know that this was only a fit of low spirits. Take this cordial, dear madam, and try to sleep."

She did, and—awoke no more!

If Rhoda felt this second deprivation less acutely than she had done the first, it was, nevertheless, a very heavy affliction. Whatever displeasure she might have felt in time past, from any parts of Mrs. Strictland's character, was now forgotten. The only impression that remained upon her mind, was that of a friend always strenuous to promote her interest; always partial, even to her faults; fondly loving and warmly admiring her; a friend, too, with whom she had that in common, which she had

with no other person; from whose censure on the great event of her life she had nothing to fear; and from whose experience and sagacity she could best hope to alleviate its consequences; whose society was the sanction, and whose house was an asylum from the weariness of her own. She was now delivered to the guidance of her own discretion, and was to depend upon her own resources to fill up those vacancies in time, which even the most dissipated life will leave at intervals. As a domestic companion she had never found Sir James sufficient for her happiness, and yet her heart revolted from a return to that "strenuous idleness," which she knew to be so unpleasing to him. She thought of him at this moment with a softness of affection she had never felt before, and with an earnest desire to show the sense she entertained of his late unbounded kindness to her; but she still did not dwell with pleasure on being dependant wholly upon him for the entertainment of her domestic hours. She

thought of Lady Emily; but Lady Emily was in Dorsetshire; and if she were not, that she should seek her society she knew to be as little agreeable to Sir James as that she should be engaged in a succession of amusements.

"In this great mass of population with which I am surrounded," thought Rhoda, "I have not a single friend! I have not a human creature to whom I can pour out the feelings of my heart, by whose wisdom I can become wise, and from whose candor I can hope for indulgence!"

In this destitution of all on whom to rely, she thought, with satisfaction, of taking Wilson about her; she seemed a part of what she had lost; she could talk to her of past days; from her she could hear the sayings of Mrs. Strictland repeated, her opinions recorded, her mode of action detailed:—it was more than she could from any other creature. She knew Sir James had never loved Mrs. Strictland; that he disapproved

her; that she could not expect any sympathy from him in the grief which she felt for her loss; but from Wilson she was sure to hear her praises, and to have her own lamentations re-echoed; and to derive such benefit from fulfilling the last will of her lamented friend, seemed as though her influence over her own happiness was perpetuated beyond the grave.

The continued absence of Lady Randolf at this time was particularly unfortunate for Rhoda.

At this period of depression and reflection, the society of Lady Randolf would have been inestimable; it would have been safety, it might have been happiness.

If she had not been able to have given Sir James in the eyes of Rhoda the charms of a lover, she might have taught her heart to admit him as her best friend, and from her she might have learnt so well to have filled up her time, and to have occupied her talents, as to have left

no vacuum in the one, nor consciousness that the other were undervalued, or not understood.

But Rhoda was doomed, to navigate the ocean of life without a pilot, and without a convoy. Shall we, then, wonder if she was shipwrecked or captured?

CHAP. LVI.

> "In her air, her face,
> In every purpose, and in every place,
> In her slow motion and her languid mien,
> The grief, the sickness of her soul is seen."
>
> *Crabbe.*

Sir James removed Rhoda from Brompton as soon as her cares there had ceased to be necessary, and he endeavoured by every means in his power to soften the sense of the loss which she had sustained. She was well disposed to benefit by this effort; the impression of his kindness when she had quitted Osbourne Park remained upon her mind; no adverse feelings had effaced its traces. She was gratefully sensible of the goodness of his heart;—insensibly she began to smile upon it, as her best consolation; she was willing to look to it as the indemnification

for what she had lost; she was surprised to find how little benefit she derived from it. But the kindness of Sir James had been the kindness of compassion, not the fondness of affection which knows itself understood by the heart to which it speaks. The sorrow, with which Rhoda had been visited, had in no respect altered the state of facts previous to her leaving Osbourne Park. Sir James's memory was too faithful to the estrangement there had been between them, to flatter himself that the death of Mrs. Strictland would give him those rights in the heart of Rhoda, which his own efforts had not been able to secure to him. Nothing in the intercourse, that had since been between them, had been calculated to do away the impression which he had received of Rhoda's coldness towards him; and the manner, in which he had passed his time while separated from her, had been inimical to that fondness of regret for her society, which might have made a reunion with her the object of his earnest wish.

Rhoda's long residence at Brompton had broken the but scarcely formed customs of a married man; and finding himself once more without a domestic companion, he had resorted again to his more confirmed habits of bachelorship. London was at this period full, and he met many old friends, from whom the new ties which he had formed during the last year had in some degree estranged him.

The confidential intercourse of old friendships had not been replaced by a softer, dearer, nearer friend. He had had a bride, he had a wife; but he had added nothing to his stock of friends: he felt an unexpected pleasure in renewing his former intimacies, and re-entering his former societies;—in speaking where he was listened to with interest, and looked up to with respect.

Sir James's visits to Brompton, although repeated in the course of the day, took up but little of his time. Rhoda, however pleased to see him, or desirous of conversing with him, could seldom be

spared from Mrs. Strictland, and when she had reported to Sir James the progress of the preceding night, or the events of the past day, she was necessitated to return to her friend; and Sir James, promising another visit, generally departed in a few minutes after his arrival.

The time, thus left upon his hands, and thus broken in upon so as to interrupt any regular disposal of it, was spent in riding or walking all over London, in the pursuit of those various novelties which are so liberally spread before the public. Panoramas, pictures, jugglers, found occupation for morning after morning for Sir James and some former friend, and he closed the day by dining at some club or private dinner, where there were only those of his own sex.

The pleasures of his former state of independence began to steal upon his fancy; and he frequently thought of the considerations due to the married state as of restraints. The fire of love would have

dissipated this gathering cloud; but Rhoda had at this instant less influence over the feelings of Sir James than she had ever had.

The brilliancy of her beauty was dimmed by the fatigues which she had undergone; the vivacity of her spirits lost in the depression of her heart. Had Sir James believed himself the object of her love, those very proofs of her sensibility would have been only so many more attractions:—he now felt them only as the lessening of her charms, and as evidences that she had lost more than he could supply. He saw her grave, and he thought her cold; but never, with respect to him, was she less so. In the present state of her feelings, she required affection rather than amusement; the want, to which she was alone sensible, was the want of a partial friend. She had felt assured that she should find such a friend in Sir James: in declining all company, she had reckoned upon a *tête-à-tête* with him, and she had said to herself,

"He will bear with me: he will not be wearied. How good, how kind he is!"

Was it chargeable upon Sir James that he was inadvertent to the change which had taken place in Rhoda's mind; and might not the evil be more justly traced to the former heedlessness of Rhoda to the wishes of Sir James? Whatever was the cause, the misfortune fell on both. Sir James, finding that Rhoda desired to remain at home, persuaded himself that she desired to be alone. He had his own engagements, his own gratifications; and doubting of his acceptability with Rhoda, he unconsciously sheltered himself from apprehended mortification, by a ready indulgence to her supposed inclinations. But often did she wish that he would share her solitary meal; often did she long, through the dreariness of the evening, for his company. To the tediousness of solitude was presently added a feeling of mortification that she should be left; and to the weariness of having passed many hours alone was added a sentiment

of resentment, which, at times, rendered her reception of Sir James, on his return to her, less cordial in the exact proportion as her regret for his absence had been greater. Yet Rhoda, accustomed to be sought, was too proud willingly to betray any consciousness of being neglected; and Sir James, pleased with his present mode of spending his time, and pre-occupied with the notion that he was not beloved by Rhoda, adverted not to the possibility that his absence could be painful to her. He believed that she was most happy when alone, and he was least the contrary when, in the conviviality of friendship, he could forget the disappointments of love. A word of *eclaircissement* would have preserved them both from much future misery; but the word was not pronounced, and the misery was incurred.

Although Sir James was hopeless of being himself able to restore Rhoda to her natural tone of spirits and powers of

enjoyment, he was not less solicitous that they should be restored. He gently urged her to begin again to shine in society;—suggested the advantages of air and variety of objects, and expressed a kind concern for her health and happiness.

There was something, however, in his tone, that came short of that warmth of interest which the dejection of her heart required to move it to a return of kindness. In the querulousness of low spirits she replied, "With whom should I associate? What friends have I, but those who were so to me for her sake who is no more?— The connecting link is gone! I am alone in this great world!"

"I perceive that you think so," replied Sir James, with a sigh; "but is it necessarily so?"

"I am conscious," returned Rhoda, "that I have lately rendered your house a desert; perhaps driven you from it. I beg that you will no longer suspend your

usual invitations. By degrees, perhaps, I may recover my former spirits, and be less a burthen to myself and others."

Tears stood in her eyes, but she turned away, as if afraid of betraying her sensibility; and Sir James, feeling that he probably made a part of the burthen of which she spoke, did not venture to attempt to lighten it by any mark of what he feared might be unwelcome fondness. While Sir James was lost in the dreariness of his own thoughts, the moments were passing when such fondness might not have been unwelcome.

"Come," said Rhoda, in a sprightlier tone, and resuming her self-command, "I will make out a list for a dinner party; and if you approve it, the cards shall be sent out."

"But if it is only a dinner party," said Sir James, "you will as usual be left alone all evening."

"As usual, indeed!" replied Rhoda; "but don't think about me. I am only

solicitous that your time should be no longer gloomy."

"Then, my dear Rhoda, I must see you less grave."

"Or see me less——either grave, or gay," replied Rhoda.

How differently were these words understood, from the sense in which they were spoken.

While Rhoda blushed, from having thus inadvertently betrayed the mortification which Sir James's supposed neglect had inflicted, Sir James imagined that she had rather expressed the wish of her own heart, than reproached him for an indifference, of which he knew himself incapable.

"That your presence does not always make me happy, I will not deny," said he; "but that your absence would render me miserable, I too feelingly know:" and as he said these words he hastily left the room.

Rhoda burst into tears, and resting her

head on the arm of a sopha, wept bitterly without restraint, and without any distinct consciousness from whence her tears flowed.

"Am I, or Sir James, to blame for this?" was the thought that most frequently made itself felt.

"Of what does he complain? What is it that I do, which is wrong? Is he jealous even of the *memory* of those I love? Alas, have not I the most cause for complaint? Sir James sought me, wooed me, spread his glittering baits before me, bewildered my senses, confounded my reason, and has made me miserable.—I spread no snares for him. With coldness, with repugnancy, with shrinking reluctance, I met his advances; my sentiments could not be mistaken; and yet, he married me! And does he now make it my crime, that I gave him not what I had not *then* to give, a heart? And now that heart turns to him, depends upon his kindness, seeks his communion, he leaves me—upbraids me—and is happy

elsewhere! Must I, after having been the victim of his self-indulgence, be sacrificed again to his injustice?"

Rhoda's tears flowed in faster currents; but these were still bitterer tears than any which she had before shed;—they were tears of resentment, of pride, of self vindication, under a consciousness of error. Suddenly the tumult of her thoughts was stilled, on the entrance of a servant, who delivered to her the following note.

"I have been in town an hour. I could not exist another without sending to hear how you do. My dearest friend, my heart has bled for you; but let us not dwell on evils that are past redress. If I can be happy enough at all to supply the place of her whom you have lost, there will yet be a joy for my *heart*, which I never expected that it would again have known. This was not to have been my year of jubilee; but I have anticipated it, that I might be near you, in the hour when I could be most useful to you.

I have fought a hard battle to accomplish this point: almost the only battle that I ever fought with *that* antagonist in my life; but when I know that I am not doing any thing really wrong, I can be steady. Sometime, my dear, you will find this to be sound morality, and true wisdom; but this is no time for lectures. Let me see you instantly: if possible, I would have come to you, but at present I have no horses. I am in a little poking house in Chesterfield-street; but no matter if we be but together, were it only in a nut-shell.

"Yours eternally,

"EMILY GRANTHAM."

"Now I have a friend!" said Rhoda. "Now my heart will speak, and will be understood, and will be answered!"

"I must have the carriage instantly," said she, ringing the bell, and speaking to the footman; "and if Sir James is in the house, pray say I shall be glad to speak to him."

The footman said, that Sir James was not in the house.

"I will leave him a note," thought Rhoda, her heart relenting towards him, as she felt herself happier. She wrote these words:

"My dear Sir James.

"There was something not well understood between us this morning. Pray let it be forgotten; forgive the peevishness of a heart ill at ease. I have ordered the cards of invitation to be written: if you like my selection, be so good as to order them to be sent out. Will you allow me to add my friend Lady Emily to the party? I learn this moment that she is come to town: I am going to her directly; perhaps, as you dine from home, I may remain with her; if I cannot prevail with her to dine with me. I would have done that which was most agreeable to you, if I could have spoken to you; but that not being the case, I take this mode of accounting for so

unusual a circumstance as my absence from home, and of preventing your surprise if, on your return in the evening, you should find me still absent, or in company with Lady Emily.

"Yours, faithfully,

"RHODA."

CHAP. LVII.



"Oh, nature! what hadst thou to do in hell,
When thou didst bower the spirit of a fiend
In mortal paradise of such sweet flesh?"

Shakspeare.

RHODA found her friend in a small, and indifferently furnished house.

"*N'importe,*" said Lady Emily, casting a contemptuous look around her. "Any thing for peace and *you*, my sweet friend. A house, not exceeding a certain price, and half my pin money, were the conditions; and I am lucky that they were not even more rigorous; for I should have signed any thing to have come to you!"

"But where are your children?" said Rhoda.

"Alas! in the country, my dear. It was not possible to put them into the narrow bounds to which I was prescribed, and my furlough is only for six weeks."

"Mr. Grantham is with you, I hope," said Rhoda.

"Certainly! You do not, I hope, think that I would have come without him?"

"I should have been sorry if you had."

"I see," said Lady Emily, with a smile of the greatest good humour, "that my dear Lady Osbourne does not do me justice. I can forgive the prejudice, because I know its source; but I am determined to *live* it down. Pray, however, give me a little credit in the mean time;—or will you *enquire* my *character* before you will allow me to dedicate myself to your service?"

"My dear Lady Emily," said Rhoda, "how can you talk so? Is it possible you can think me so illiberal? If you knew the transport with which I saw your handwriting;—if you knew the depth of de-

spondency from whence it drew me ;—you would acknowledge that I want no testimony to your excellence beyond that of my own heart."

"I have no doubt of it, my dear," replied Lady Emily; "and I hope that it is so far allowed in *another place*, as that there will be no impediment to our meeting at all hours. If I were to find your doors shut against me, I should fly back into Dorsetshire in the sixth part of my allotted six weeks."

"You will find," said Rhoda, "that I can adopt some of your maxims; and that 'when I know I am not doing any thing really wrong,' I can prefer my own wishes to those of another, whatever subserviency may have been vowed to that other. But I do not believe there is any probability of difference in this case. I spend my time *now* so much alone, that *who* is my companion will hardly be called in question."

Lady Emily looked on Rhoda, as if she meant to read her very soul.

"I am astonished!—I thought when you left Dorsetshire, that any little estrangement—I don't know what I would say;—but I was prepared to find you a very enviable being.—And is there, then, indeed, not to be *one* exception from the curse of womanhood?—Ah! my sweet friend, and cannot beauty, such as yours, redeem you a little, a very little longer, from the withering effects of possession?"

"I have not spirits to go into company," said Rhoda, blushing at once from a sense of mortified vanity, and a fear of being unjust to Sir James. "But that was no reason why those, who have, should seclude themselves from the world."

"I cannot tell," said Lady Emily. "I should have thought—but it is no matter. I am come to town for the sole purpose of dedicating myself to you;—and if *toujours poulet* will not pall upon the appetite, you need not henceforth be alone."

Rhoda pressed Lady Emily's hand tenderly between her own.

"You cannot fear it," said she. "I have not now to learn that there is a delicacy, a constancy in female friendship, of which the other sex have no conception."

"Let us be just," said Lady Emily. "Men, as *friends*, do not yield to women in the truth and delioacy of their affections. But we traffic with them only as lovers, and so we become bankrupts."

"But why should not friendship succeed to love?" said Rhoda.

"I don't know why," said Lady Emily, carelessly; "but it is not the way. When toys have lost their novelty, we forget them."

Rhoda sighed. "That is but too true, perhaps," thought she.

"Let us have done with the subject," said she. "It is not calculated to raise my spirits. Will you dine with me—or cannot you leave Mr. Grantham?"

"Oh! my dear," said Lady Emily; "my novelty has been past these hundred years. Mr. Grantham has already

left me. I have no charm to cover the scrambling uncomfortableness of a first day's dinner in London. I shall be delighted to dine with you, and to pass the whole day with you, if you like it."

"Nothing so much," said Rhoda.—And Lady Emily having changed her travelling dress, the two ladies drove together to Brook-street.

Here, restored to the pleasures of companionship, Rhoda, without even meaning to confide, and still less to complain, was soon led to open her whole storehouse of grievances to her more artful friend.

The deprivation, that she had sustained by the death of Mrs. Strictland, was naturally connected with the compensation she had hoped for from Sir James. The disappointment of her hopes, and the consequent solitary hours which she had passed, made but the natural, and almost inevitable corollary to such a discourse. But she lamented rather than accused; wondered rather than condemned: was

ready to take blame to herself, and unfeignedly asked counsel of her friend how best to remedy the evil.

"To you who have scarcely passed your bridal days, my dear," replied Lady Emily, "all this seems mighty sad and mighty strange;—to me nothing can appear more simple, more in the course of things:—the principle producing the consequence,—the effect following the cause."

"But the remedy?" said Rhoda.

"The remedy, my dear, can never lie in wearing yourself to a skeleton. Will eyes, dimmed with tears, be more attractive than when sparkling with gaiety and good humour?"

"But there must be a fault somewhere?"

"The fault is in human nature. Sir James is no more to blame than yourself. He would be as glad to think you as handsome now as he thought you four months ago, as you would be to have him think

so; but the thing is impossible:—and will you be such a baby as to cry for the moon?"

"There is something faulty in your reasoning," replied Rhoda. "It is contradicted by repeated experience. Though personal charms may be fleeting, the affection, which originally sprung from them, is not always so. Do you not argue from a particular instance to a general conclusion?"

"Without vanity, my dear, I think I may say, that what *I* could not do cannot be done."

"But do you not believe that it has been done? Do you not believe that the wife *has* been dearer than the bride?"

"*Never*, my dear; take my word for it. It sounds mighty prettily in verse, but it is not in nature. You, however, are recent from your Darby and Joan studies; and nothing but a better knowledge of the world will cure you."

"Could I believe you, I should wish that I had never been born."

"And why, I beg to know? You might as well wish that you had never been young, because you must be old. To take things as we find them is both good philosophy and good morality.—So I have done, and so I advise you to do."

"I *must* take things as they are," said Rhoda. "But how to make the best of them?"

"By turning them to your amusement; and by looking on the substance, and not on the shadow. I suppose—" with a turn of the eye which disconcerted Rhoda, "'it was not 'all for love' that won Sir James your fair hand. There still remains what has its value; and what, if you are a reasonable woman, may very well content you."

"I don't like your regimen," said Rhoda; "it has nothing to do with the heart."

"Pray, my dear, what had your heart to do in your marriage with Sir James?"

Rhoda covered her face with her hands.

"Now, don't be a baby," said Lady

Emily: "I do not mean to reproach you."

"I had a very sincere esteem for Sir James," replied Rhoda, warmly; "and if my heart had nothing to do in my marriage, the ardent love that Sir James felt for me had a great deal."

"Well, be it so: I never dispute positive assertions. One caution, however, take from me,—not to find your heart a little too late. You and I should forget, if it were possible, that we have hearts, —except for each other. Our greatest danger lies in the consciousness of having a heart."

"I do not feel any danger there," said Rhoda: "but I dread vacuity."

"Cannot you cocker up this 'very sincere esteem' into a tolerably-sized passion, that may do very well for all matrimonial purposes; and which will acquire interest from a consciousness that it is not returned?—And thus you may go on loving to the end of the chapter."

Go on! thought Rhoda. Oh! that

I had but begun so, I should fear neither my own instability, nor the waning of Sir James's affections.

"I have no such consciousness, I assure you," replied Rhoda. "I believe that Sir James still loves me; and I would learn of you how to make him love me for ever."

"Love!—and for ever!—Alas! my dear, I have no such recipe. I know what will not do, but I do not know what will."

"What is it that will not do?" said Rhoda.

"Enacting what is called 'the good wife,'" said Lady Emily. "Fancying that if you can please *caro sposo,* it signifies little who else you do not please. The converse of the proposition is nearer the truth: please others, and you will please him. There is not one man in twenty who sees with his own eyes; and no man likes a wife that nobody likes but himself. I impute the *shortness,* at least, of my reign to having been immediately immured in the country. Mr. Grantham

ceased to hear of my charms, and he forgot that I had any. I went on blunderingly, thinking that henceforth my virtues were to be my charms; and did not discover my mistake till the evil was irreparable."

"Yet, I think, Sir James would love me longer in the country than in town," said Rhoda.

"No such thing, my dear Lady Osbourne, depend upon me. You are in the happiest possible circumstances for keeping up the waning fire of matrimonial love. Make Sir James see that he is envied, and he will then appreciate the jewel he possesses. Think for yourself; act for yourself; avoid singularity; observe decorum:—and then do every thing that pleases yourself."

"Shall we ask Sir James's opinion of your doctrine?" said Rhoda; "for here he comes."

Sir James returned to the novel spectacle of a cheerful countenance. Rhoda met him with a smile; and though her

cheek was still pale, her eye was no longer heavy. She had, too, changed the dress of the morning; and her whole appearance seemed to say that she no longer meant to play the recluse.

"I am forgiven, I hope?" said she, holding out her hand to him. "I will be pettish no more."

How such an act of good-natured conciliation might have been received, had they been alone, it is impossible to say; but the presence of Lady Emily, the attractions in Rhoda's dress and manner, gave Sir James the impression that the whole scene was prepared, and that Rhoda was only repeating a lesson taught by her more practised and worldly-wise friend.

No man likes to be duped; and though Sir James had often been wounded by the ingenuousness of Rhoda, he had always held the frankness of her nature as one of her most attractive charms, and as his surest guarantee that the evil extended no farther than it was visi-

ble. But any appearance of art must at once weaken her interest in his affections, and submit her most indifferent actions to the ordeal of suspicion.

This appearance struck him, for the first time, at this moment. The hand was coldly accepted; scarcely retained an instant; and, without making any direct reply to Rhoda, Sir James advanced to make his compliments to Lady Emily.

"Lady Emily is right," thought Rhoda; "Sir James does *indeed* love me no longer!"

A glance from her friend's eye struck the conviction still deeper; and while Rhoda coloured from resentment, she drooped with dejection.

Sir James was not unobserving of all this; but he mistook the mortification of repulsed kindness for the vexation of baffled art. Lady Emily's manners towards himself tended but the more to confirm this mistake.

He had good reason to know that she hated him. He was well acquainted

with the malice and duplicity of her character; and could not but impute to some design inimical to his peace the studied blandishment and suavity of address with which she now treated him.

"Lady Emily is to instruct Rhoda how to manage me," thought Sir James.

Now it happened, that if there was one point more than another, against which the pride of Sir James particularly revolted, it was from the notion of being managed by a wife. Of the authority of a husband he had the most orthodox opinions; and the extreme indulgence, with which he had hitherto treated Rhoda, was not more from the gratification which he had in being the instrument of her pleasures than from the belief that she *exacted* nothing; and, that if he had acted otherwise, she would implicitly have adopted any suggestion of his. In tightening the rein, he flattered himself that he should sufficiently remind her of her subserviency, as to obviate the necessity of resorting to

severer measures; and he hoped, by evincing that his affection was rather the offspring of his judgment than the controller of his will, she would be led henceforth to cultivate that, which hitherto she had seemed to regard, as perennial without her care.

There was no one to whom such a mode of treatment applied less than to Rhoda.

High-spirited, and conscious, even amidst a sense of her instability and errors, of the integrity of her heart, and of the superior endowments of mind and person with which she had been gifted by nature, she thought of nothing so little as of being ruled by the rod of authority. In her whole life she had never bent before it; and while from a principle of duty she would yield more than could be exacted, not a particle of her obedience could be *compelled* from her without the wreck of her happiness.

Of the duties of a wife, voluntarily contracted, she had as high a sense as Sir

James himself could have; and would have held herself guilty had she failed in them even to a husband, whom she had neither loved nor respected;—hitherto they had been the willing offering of gratitude and esteem. If they were not withheld for the future, it was more in consideration of her own dignity than of Sir James's happiness.

So little, indeed, had Rhoda of that art of which Sir James had begun to suspect her, that she could not, even at the instigation of her own pride, conceal the chagrin that his repulse had occasioned. Tears, in spite of her utmost efforts to restrain them, stole down her cheeks; and she remained silent, resting her head upon her hand, while Lady Emily, with ineffable sweetness, and with a moderated tone of cheerfulness, which shewed at once her consciousness of her friend's uneasiness, and her desire not to appear to see it, continued to converse with Sir James; mingling so many natural strokes of propriety of feeling and discriminating

candour, as they discussed the topics of the day, as to give Rhoda a higher opinion of her head and heart than she had ever entertained before; and quite to obliterate the disapprobation, which some parts of the lecture, in the former part of the evening, had generated. If she did not deceive Sir James, it was not that he was insensible to her power of charming, but that he had been charmed before, and knew that 'all which glittered was not gold.'

When she arose to go, she embraced Rhoda tenderly.

"Good night, my dearest friend;—for all our sakes think more of what you retain, than of what you have lost: and how much more do you possess than half your sex!"

"Oh! do not *you* so soon withdraw your hand," said Rhoda, retaining, as if unable to let it go, one of the fair hands of Lady Emily within her own. "We must meet every day,—every hour."

"I shall always be to be found," re-

plied Lady Emily; "but I must not be importuning: I must not wear the steps of my neighbour's door, though he *is* a wise man," said she, smiling on Sir James.

"I hope," said Sir James, "that Rhoda will now begin to mix more in general society again; it is *my* wish that she should do so."

He spoke in an authoritative tone; and Rhoda durst not trust her voice to bid her friend good night, lest she should burst into tears.

Lady Emily spoke farther. "*Then* she *will* mix more in general society, I am sure," said she. "Indeed, it is the best and wisest thing she can do. Lady Osbourne knows that it is the very advice I have given her."

"And the advice," said Rhoda, making an effort to speak steadily, "that I will take."

The door shut out Lady Emily; and Sir James and Rhoda stood for some minutes, each with their eyes fixed upon

the fire, in silence. Rhoda, at length, lighted her taper, and turned towards the door.

"Rhoda!" said Sir James.

"Sir!" replied Rhoda; and the word shot through his veins like ice.

"Do you wish that Lady Emily should be of the dinner party on Thursday?"

"As you please," replied Rhoda.

"I wish you would have a choice," said Sir James.

"It is that which I cannot have," said Rhoda, and withdrew.

"Is this plan?" thought Sir James, "or is it peevishness—or genuine indifference? It is any thing but kindness,—any thing but a desire to generate kindness."

Sir James went down to his dressing-room to debate this question more at leisure; and Rhoda went up to her room to weep bitterly; and to hasten to bed, that Sir James might not discover she had done so.

CHAP. LVIII.

"Amid a world of dangers, venturing forth,
Frail, but yet fearless! proud in conscious worth."

Crabbe.

"I WISH," said Sir James, as he quitted Rhoda for the morning, "that you would ask Lady Emily and Mr. Grantham for Thursday. I have no desire but to be upon the best footing with them, and Mr. Grantham is a man whom I sincerely esteem."

"I will do as you order me," said Rhoda.

"Pray change the word to desire," said Sir James, who began a little to repent of the experiment of the night before.

"It is the same thing," said Rhoda.

"I am come," said Rhoda to Lady Emily, "as an emissary and as a principal. As an emissary, I invite you and Mr. Grantham to dine with Sir James on Thursday; and as a principal, I tell you, that I will no more repeat the kind of conversation which we had yesterday. It sours my temper, it weakens my mind, makes me less sensible of my comforts, more alive to my discontents. From this day, I intend to return to my former mode of life; I will go every where, I will see every body: but I will do all in your company. I had planned another disposal of my time for this winter; but the grounds on which I rested it have crumbled from under my feet. I can do but as others do, and in your society I shall do it safely."

"All this is mighty grave, mighty wise, and very magnificent!" replied Lady Emily, laughing: "but it is but one other stage in the journey which we all make. I have had my heroics as well as

you; they serve *pour passer le tems:* but you will settle down into good, rational, independent self-enjoyment, like the rest of us presently, without either throwing down your glove at every folly and vanity that comes in your way; or without supposing yourself, like the damsels of old, in danger of being devoured by some monster at every step you take. Well, how are we to begin in this famous career? What will you do with yourself, to-night?"

Rhoda laid before Lady Emily a list of possibilities, and desired her to make a selection: this was easily done. But again Lady Emily observed, "that she had no horses," and again Rhoda assured her, that her carriage was as much at her disposal as her own.

"Then let it take us immediately to Madame Bertie's and Madame Triand's. I have not a thing to wear, and though those are personages too expensive for me to traffic with much, yet I shall there best learn how to dress myself, and they

can furnish me with what I want, 'till I have learnt."

Rhoda willingly complied, and recollecting the hint that Lady Emily had given of the sacrifice of half her pin-money, found means to overcome the scruples of her friend, while she gratified her own liberal mind, by presenting her with dresses and ornaments that seemed most to please her fancy.

"If in the destiny that I have chosen there are chagrins," thought Rhoda, "there are also counterbalances."

And it was this consideration, from whence had arisen the decided tone that Rhoda had now taken; she had said to herself, "At length I will be wise. Abjuring the fairyism of life, I will look only at its realities. My dear Lady Randolf has long since told me, that unmixed good is not the lot of mortality. I might have made a better choice,—my sad and vacant heart tells me that I might; but the choice is made, and let the courage,

with which I bear it, redeem the folly of the decision. It is not for me, unsupported by the dignity of married happiness, to presume to change the fashion of morals, as once I vainly boasted that I should do; but I may yet shew the world that I am sufficient to the right conduct of myself; that, unprotected by the buckler of a husband's love, and unguarded by my love for him, I can yet pass through 'the world's great snare uncaught.' Lady Randolf and my Frances, after all my mistakes, shall not blush for me! They shall acknowledge that if I have sacrificed my happiness, I have kept safe my integrity."

Rhoda perceived not that, in this laudable design, she lived as much to the opinion of the world as when she sacrificed the affections of her heart to its allurements, that vanity was still the actuating principle, and the love of distinction, (that love for which she had resigned all other loves,) was still the

same. She felt herself chastised, and she believed that she was reformed; but she might have known how little humility there was in her self-condemnation, by the invincible repugnancy that she found to confess her errors, even to those who, she knew, would be the most ready to pardon them.

She ceased to write either to Lady Randolf or to Miss Wyburg, and rather chose to incur the imputation of neglect and forgetfulness, than by betraying her unhappiness, to reveal the mistake that she had made. Nothing in the passing hour reminded her of either. Miss Wyburg had perceived the growing reserve of her letters from the period of her intimacy with Lady Emily, and had imputed that intimacy as its source; though it was in fact the increasing discontent of Rhoda's mind, which had its date from the same period, and had alone diminished the frankness of her communications. Miss Wyburg, however, knew not

this; and after some fruitless attempts to maintain her place in the confidence of her friend, she desisted from all intercourse, without resentment, and rather with a tender sorrow that felt more for the failure of rectitude in the creature whom she loved than of what she personally suffered from her dereliction. Something of the same kind of feeling, though in a less degree, had also put an end to the correspondence with Lady Randolf. She believed that her letters were unwelcome, and she ceased to write.

Rhoda, thus abandoned to her own presumption, and the dangerous guidance of Lady Emily, rushed eagerly on the world; for in its tumult alone could she forget herself.

Sir James, whose hope of domestic comfort was extinct, sought not to restrain her; but he watched her with the most scrupulous diligence.

The most scrupulous diligence found nothing to reprove.

Assailed, as she continued to be on every side, by the most insidious adulation, wooed by the most delicate and unremitting attentions, he saw her hold on her way, undeviating from the narrow line of dignified propriety which she had ever kept, equally free from the lightness of coquetry, and the affectation of prudery; gay, brilliant, giving and seeming to receive pleasure from all, without distinguishing any. He might have believed her happy, and have wondered why she did not make him so: but accustomed to the expression of her eye, and often witness to the tear which had frequently dimmed its lustre, he knew that her heart was heavy, and in the secret of that heart he believed lay the obstacle to his own happiness. No longer could he hope that time or circumstance could make that heart his; for no longer did he doubt but that it was another's! He was not able to withstand the conviction that she had sacrificed her first affections to ambition; and he could now retrace

the signs which had made this evident in time, would he then have attended to them, to have preserved them both.

The emotion which she had betrayed the morning of the auction; the sudden breaking off all intimacy with Lady Williams, and the repugnancy even to horror which she had shewn to re-visiting Byrhley, he imputed all to the same cause. To this, too, his self-love referred his inability to touch her heart; and in this, rather than in principle, or coldness, did he find the reason why she passed safely through the ordeal, where so many others perished.

Yet if nothing now had occurred, if her heart had *never* been his, why were her manners towards him so changed? He was unconscious, on his part, of any abatement in kindness, or in love. Complacency, gratitude, esteem, familiarity, had once made up their connexion. Why now was substituted a studied obedience, verbal acknowledgment, respect,

reverence? He imputed the change to the schooling of Lady Emily: it was her own conduct, modified by the differences of character between himself and Mr. Grantham; and he foresaw from it the same comfortless and desolated home which he knew Mr. Grantham's to be.

Yet if he wished to break the intimacy between Lady Emily and Rhoda, it was more for Rhoda's sake than his own.

"For me," he would say, "there is little to be hoped; with all my precaution I have played the fool at five-and-forty: this comes of being wise too soon. Had I played the fool at five-and-twenty, though I had loved indiscreetly, I too might have been beloved. There is now no remedy: but I would not, if I could help it, that Rhoda should become a cold, unfeeling, heartless woman of fashion. Were it not for Lady Emily, I might *yet* be her friend;—we might be happy. Alas! I am a fool still; I still hope for impossibilities: but let me not leave undone all that *is* possible!"

In prosecution of his design, he sought, when the next favourable opportunity occurred, to discover how far Rhoda would endure any control over her intercourse with Lady Emily.

Rhoda, whose feelingson this point were all alive, understood him at half a word, and the shade that crossed her brow presaged ill to the success of his remonstrance.

"I could not have believed," said she, "that there was any thing in my conduct which you could have reproved: I imagined that I had your permission for all I did."

"You were not unaware, I believe," said Sir James, "that Lady Emily does not possess my good opinion; but if she did, I could not wish that you should be given up to any body, as you are to her;—except myself;" added he, with a sigh.

"And yet," said Rhoda, "you did not wish me to live alone."

"Is there no other being that you can love, except Lady Emily?" said Sir James.

"I do not love any body else, *here*," said Rhoda.

"It seems," replied Sir James, "that you are inclined to like those best whom I like least."

"I am not conscious of any such perverseness," replied Rhoda: "perhaps I might, with more reason, retort the accusation. Lady Emily is the second associate, of whom you have disapproved. Your objections to Lady Williams were, however, well founded: I saw that they were, and our intimacy ceased. I did not hear your prejudices against Lady Emily with disregard,—they put me upon my guard; but my closest inspection has found nothing to disapprove, and I continue to associate with her.—This is not perverseness, but reason."

"I believe," said Sir James, with a bitter kind of smile, "that a husband loves compliance better than reason."

"If you exact such a test of my obedience," said Rhoda, "I shall certainly give it:

but I will not conceal from you, that the sacrifice will not be of my *happiness alone!*"

"And yet," replied Sir James, "a consideration for your happiness would be my sole motive for doing so—my own is out of the question. But I know Lady Emily better than you do;—an intimacy with her will not contribute to your happiness, will not contribute to ——— Rhoda, you are too good to be a second Lady Emily!"

"I have indeed," said Rhoda, with a tone of heart-felt sadness, "justified the opinion, that I am a bad judge of what will contribute to my happiness; yet, in *this case*, it will not be very easy to persuade me that I am mistaken."

"Then," replied Sir James, "you must again learn from experience, what counsel might more safely teach. The serpent will sting you; but in *this* case, if I cannot convince, I will not over-rule."

Rhoda felt the weight of authority in

the emphasis which Sir James laid upon the word *this*; and felt it as a hardship. She was conscious that wherever else she had failed, her obedience had been perfect; and had hoped to have spared her pride the mortification of having it pressed upon her notice: but this was only the beginning of her vexations on this score. The growing moroseness of Sir James made her every day more and more sensible of her dependance upon his will.

His affections unanswered, his hopes disappointed, his vanity mortified; neither his unextinguished love, nor the respect that he felt for the purity and dignity of character displayed by Rhoda, nor even the compassion which at times arose within his breast, for the fate which at nineteen she had imposed upon herself, could preserve, unbroken, the equanimity of his temper.

Tell me, where is the man that in similar circumstances would not equally

have failed? Rhoda could not now say, "Sir James likes whatever I like;" on the contrary, she might more truly have said, "Sir James likes nothing that I like." There were moments when the sound of her voice alone would irritate his feelings beyond the power of his self-command: hence a peevishness for which no cause appeared, or a sternness of control for which nothing on Rhoda's part gave occasion, seemed to betray the bitterest dislike to a creature, whom of all others existing he loved the best; loved with increasing ardour, with an intenseness of passion that made him wretched. He was but too sensible of his own harshness, but he sought rather to justify than to repress it. He had tried indulgence and complacency,—he believed that he had been repaid with ingratitude; and in resorting now to severity, he endeavoured to persuade himself that it was less from the austerity of his feelings, than from the strict guardianship which he was

bound to exercise towards a wife, who neglected to provide for her safety by cultivating an affection for her husband. Rhoda, on her part, forgot that this cultivation was as much her duty as to obey him; and that it was not less so sedulously to endeavour to make him love her: but she rather resented the imagined diminution of affection as an offence, than lamented it as a misfortune, which she was called upon, if possible, to remedy; she sought therefore only to place her own conduct beyond the reach of common censure, and became careless how little she contributed to the happiness of Sir James, or conciliated his good will.

She had no wounded affections to struggle with, and possessing from nature a temper, which, however warm, was neither slightly irritable, nor at all vindictive, she opposed only silence to Sir James's ill-humour; and if she did not condescend to disarm him by sweetness or gaiety, she forbore to provoke him, even by the most reasonable vindication,

or the gentlest remonstrance: but such forbearance gave not happiness to herself, nor bestowed it upon Sir James. His apparent uneasiness awakened at times her compassion for him; and she would then question her heart, whether any mode of conduct on her part could more contribute to an end, which, if accomplished, must certainly lessen both Sir James's chagrins and her own.

"I could, indeed, be more at home," thought she; "but it does not appear that Sir James would be more happy if I were. By the eagerness with which he flies from his own house, and by the few hours that he passes there, I must conclude that he finds, at least, amusement elsewhere; and I cannot now even amuse. Why should I seclude myself from that, which, if it makes not my happiness, preserves me from the misery of memory? In the earlier part of my marriage, I might, perhaps, have exchanged dissipation for home, and have found peace of mind, at least, in administering to Sir James's

wishes. Now the alternative is, the distraction of thought which preserves me from reflection, or the reflection that would make me miserable. I do not owe to Sir James's present disposition the latter part of the alternative."

CHAP. LIX.



"So glozed the Tempter!"

Milton.

From the forlorn sensations which such reasonings failed not to create, Rhoda flew for relief to the company of her friend: the remedy was at first infallible; by degrees it became less so. Nature had not designed Rhoda for a pupil to Lady Emily; she could not move in a sphere where self alone was the centre; and while she continued to be gratified by Lady Emily's flattery, dazzled by her talents, and amused by her conversation, her affection was chilled by the worldly and selfish spirit which broke out from under all this splendid drapery. From wondering why Lady Emily's company did not

satisfy, as in time past, she began to discern some reasons why it should not. Amidst the strongest claims to the most incautious and undesigning of characters, Rhoda thought that she sometimes detected the traces of art, which awakened at once suspicions of the genuineness of the affections and the principles of Lady Emily; her thoughts flew back to the lucid sincerity and honest love of Lady Randolf and Miss Wyburg.

"What a prodigal have I been," thought she, "in friendship and in love! Who might have been so rich? Who can be more poor?"

Pondering these thoughts with a correspondent heaviness of heart, she one morning stopped at her bookseller's shop to inquire after a new publication. As she was questioning the man from the window of the carriage, a gentleman issued from the shop, whom she instantly recognised as Mr. Ponsonby. She saw, by his sudden start, that he also recog-

nised her. His first impulse seemed to be, as in their former interview, to escape; but, with a recollected air, he stopt, bowed respectfully, and hurried on.

"I still reign in that heart!" said Rhoda to herself; and the flood of recollections and regrets which followed bore down all present thoughts, all present designs, and left the bookseller waiting in astonished expectation for the unfinished sentence.

"Shall the books be sent to Brook-street, my lady?" said the man.

"Sir!" replied Rhoda.

The man repeated the question.

"What books?" said Rhoda; and as she said it, another apparition again changed the current of her thoughts.

Lord William St. Quintin's voice from the opposite side of the carriage made her turn her eyes that way, and the pleasure with which she beheld him was instantly apparent.

"Are you then at length arrived?" said

she. "How much have we wanted you! Where can you have buried yourself so long?"

"Where," replied Lord William, with a sigh, "it might have been best that I had remained. Had I the wisdom of a child, I should not again run into danger."

"I hope," said Rhoda, "that all those clouds which obscured your family horizon have passed; and that now you are come amongst us, it will be to enjoy yourself."

"That will depend upon others rather than myself," replied Lord William; "but are the gay pantomimes of this busy place as attractive to you as those sublime scenes in which you were so enwrapt during the ever-to-be-regretted days of the Isle of Wight? If they are, I shall envy the versatility of your taste."

"As the lord of countless flocks might envy the possessor of the single ewe lamb," said Rhoda, laughing. "You must be an altered personage if *my*

versatility of taste can be the object of your envy."

"I *am* an altered man," replied Lord William; "and however perverse it may seem, I prefer the pains of stability to the pleasures of change."

"And yet you envy my supposed variableness of taste?"

"Oh! *une façon de parler;* for, *en verité,* I would not exchange my sombre immutability for the gayest of your changeable colours; if I may so say without offence to my dear Lady Osbourne."

"I am more of your mind, perhaps, than you are aware," replied Rhoda; "and though you will hear of me as the most fluttering of the gilded butterflies that skim the flowers of this gay parterre, yet I verily long for a place whereon to rest, and spread my wings no more."

"And is not such a spot to be found in Brook-street?" said Lord William, with a penetrating look.

"Of course," replied Rhoda, blushing; "but I was speaking of more general

society. That little agreeable cousin of yours, Lady Emily, is gifted with the power of perpetual motion, and can find amusement in nothing else. The argument of making the most of her time, leaves her really no time to enjoy any thing."

"Is she not a delightful creature?" said Lord William. "I anticipated the mutual affection that you would find in each other; I understand you are much together."

"Almost inseparably so," said Rhoda: "I am going to her now."

"Would it be presuming too much, to ask you to take me with you?"

"Oh! not in the least," said Rhoda. "Open the door," said she to the footman.

"You are not going away without giving your orders to that poor man," said Lord William, "who has, with such exemplary patience, abided the result of our colloquy."

Rhoda coloured with the recollection of all that had passed in her mind since she had begun to speak to him, and finding it impossible to piece the chain of thought which had been so suddenly broken, simply said that "she would call again," and drove away to Lady Emily's.

"This is exactly as I could wish it," said Lady Emily, when she saw Rhoda and Lord William enter together. "My dear Lady Osbourne begins, I fear, to weary of the eternal *poulet*; but I hope, with the piquant sauce of my spirited cousin, she may endure it a little longer."

"If my dear little chicken," said Rhoda, "would be a little less locomotive, she would want no auxiliary to her all-sufficiency; but I confess that this unceasing flattery does really wrong me."

"Oh! you and I will domesticate the little fidgetting animal," said Lord William. "To begin: of the ten places where you are engaged to-night, I require you to give up six. Let us meet here at an

early hour, take care that your coffee is good, and trust us for 'the feast of reason and the flow of soul.'"

"Agreed!" said Lady Emily; "the novelty will at least have charms; and now you must be gone, my good cousin, for I have studied two or three wise sentences which your hobbyship must not hear."

"*Au revoir*, then!" said Lord William, kissing the hand of his fair hostess, and gently pressing that of Rhoda. "We meet in the evening."

"That's the best creature existing!" said Lady Emily; "but he suffers his happiness to be at the mercy of every beat of his heart."

"It is not exactly so, that I should have praised him," said Rhoda.

"Oh! you see him but as the world sees him; he 'fools it to the top of its bent,' and then is supposed to be one of its greatest fools; but were you once to see him in his home dress, you would find that he is the fool of nature, not of the world."

"I certainly thought him a very different man in the Isle of Wight, to what he had appeared in more general society."

"And you saw him there only partially unveiled; but let this pass; I want to talk of myself, and not of my sapient cousin. In a word, my dear, I want your advice, your assistance; I am in the most tantalizing position possible. My London campaign, you know, was to have finished in a week's time. While I believed my fate inevitable, I submitted to it with the resignation of a martyr; but if I could jump over one fortnight, I should escape the stake for at least another month to come; yet with this heaven in view, I fear purgatory must be my portion."

"Let me understand you," said Rhoda, "you have so jumbled your metaphors, and have expressed yourself so figuratively, that I cannot guess what you would be at."

"So it is when we would rather insinuate than explain; but the plain English of

the matter, my dear, is this: Mr. Grantham will not incur the expense of house rent one hour beyond the day to which he originally agreed; but he would have no objection to remaining in town a few weeks longer, if he were relieved from this burthen. Now, my dear friend, Lady Hampton, the best-hearted and best-tempered creature breathing, is luckily obliged to go into the country in three weeks time: she offers to lend me her house—a beautiful house, just the thing that I should like to inhabit—for as long as I want it, if I can only manage to get over this intervening fortnight."

"And will not Mr. Grantham——"

"Oh! don't talk of it, my dear; he would as soon part with twenty-four drops of his heart's blood as the twenty-four guineas necessary to give me this indulgence, and I am at my wits' end to get over the difficulty; for I confess that it does mortify me to the quick to lose so much pleasure for so paltry a consider-

ation; besides the kindness that I should do my dear Lady Hampton, in saving her some weeks' expense in having her house taken care of; and she can't let it because it *may* happen that her son may return from the continent, and then she must come to town to meet him; and so, between my love for myself, and my love for Lady Hampton, I am ready to cry for vexation."

"I see no way," replied Rhoda, "of 'making all these odds even,' but that you should become my guest for this important fortnight, which I am afraid it is not in our power to strike out of the calendar."

"Oh! on no account whatever, my dear friend," cried Lady Emily; "I hope you do not believe that such a thought could enter my head; I would rather never see dear London again than be accessary, even to the *possibility*, of adding one shade to the darkness of Sir James's brow."

"Do you suppose," said Rhoda, gaily,

"that I have no house but the one in Brook-street? *This* house is mine; I have taken it from the day when you were to have left it, and I hope you will inhabit it till you can go to Lady Hampton's."

Lady Emily, with well acted surprise, looked for a moment at Rhoda, as if she doubted what she heard: then casting up her bright eyes to heaven, and finally folding her beautiful arms round her friend, she murmured out, "Excellent, charming, generous creature! How, how shall I thank you, how love you as you deserve? But no, no, I would not abuse such goodness for the world; yet how shall I part from so much kindness?"

"Oh! fie! my dear Lady Emily," replied Rhoda, "how can you so estimate, so overrate such a trifle? I should have been ashamed to have offered it, had I not hoped you would have considered that *meum* and *tuum* make no part of the distinction between us."

"On one condition," replied Lady

Emily, "I will *suspend* all thoughts that it does; you shall have a mortgage on my pin money, which you know is already so deeply engaged, that I fear you will think but ill of the security."

"Such as it is," replied Rhoda, "I am willing to take it; and so that matter is settled, and need be thought of no more."

"Yes; but how shall I manage with Mr. Grantham?" said Lady Emily: "for he has different notions of *meum* and *tuum* to yours and mine, and would, I verily believe, rather live for a fortnight in a garret for which he paid himself, than in a palace at the cost of another."

"I cannot help you there," replied Rhoda; "the simple truth is generally the best, and I hope Mr. Grantham will not refuse me the pleasure of retaining you with me, upon my own terms."

"The simple truth will not do with all constitutions, any more than the simple element," replied Lady Emily; "bullion itself, my sweet friend, must have some alloy to make it fit for vulgar use; and

so must truth: but the adulteration shall be, in this case, as slight as possible; for nobody can abominate trick and subterfuge more than myself; of this you may be assured."

With how much, or how little, of this necessary adulteration Lady Emily settled the matter with Mr. Grantham, will, perhaps, never be known; but by some proportion she made it so palatable, that there appeared no objection on his part to accepting Rhoda's kindness, and this in the way the most agreeable to herself. Her delicacy was not hurt by any undue acknowledgment; it was impossible to guess, by word, or look, or symptom of any kind, that he was conscious of owing her any obligation.

CHAP. LX.

"Benetted round with villanies!"

Shakespeare.

After this transaction, things went on in their usual course, unless that Lady Emily now spent a very considerable part of many evenings at home, and what was still more extraordinary, with apparent satisfaction to herself. Dinners and evening parties made no part of Mr. Grantham's concessions in the treaty for the London journey, and therefore Lady Emily's house had hitherto been little more to her than a lodging, or a place where the cards and invitations of her acquaintance might be left, and from whence she could date her acceptance of their civilities. No one was admitted within its doors,

except Rhoda and a very few of her most intimate friends, before whom, as she said, she "need not blush to be seen in such a hole." Her family connexions were numerous, and between them and her more general acquaintance, it was seldom that she dined at home; and when she did, it was alone, as Mr. Grantham could always find a more agreeable engagement than a *tête-à-tête* with Lady Emily. But now she frequently engaged Rhoda to "eat a mutton chop" with her, and sometimes their sober colloquy was enlivened by Lord William St. Quintin, who would drop in, as it were, by accident, and beg to share their frugal meal. This he would often embellish by a luxurious dessert of the rarest fruit, or the most delicious ices. The conversation would then turn wholly on the charm of freedom from all ceremony,—the higher relish of "love and a dinner of herbs," to all the most refined mysteries of the culinary art, chilled by frigid indifference, or rendered nauseous by pride, impertinence, and ostentation.

Rhoda on these points said little, but she felt more than the others said; and no sooner did Lord William perceive that she did so, than he gave the current of discourse another turn. He exchanged sentiment for amusement, wise sayings for satirical anecdotes; or he spoke of poetry, painting, natural history, till one, at least, of his charmed auditors, forgot "all seasons and their change," and Lady Emily was obliged to remind her guests of their several engagements, and to break up the congress.

But not alone did Rhoda owe the delights of Lord William's conversation to what she believed to be accidental causes. Lady Emily, by degrees, and as a matter of choice, now drew round her, without any direct or formal invitation, "a few chosen friends," till she often found her tiny drawing-room filled by five or six persons, who, she said, were "all animated by the same ethereal spark as themselves, and who knew equally to appreciate and to enjoy the precious moments thus stolen

from the heartless world." To the cause of such a change in the taste of Lady Emily, Rhoda did not advert; she supposed it to arise from the actual pleasure that she took in a conversation which pleased herself so well, and it was sufficient to satisfy her, that by these means she ceased to be handed about, without peace or cessation, from place to place, to no praiseworthy purpose, and with little present pleasure.

Of these "chosen friends," thus assembled, the majority were females; but there were enough of the other sex to take away all appearance of any particular end in view, from Lord William being the constant and sole *cicisbeo*. To Rhoda it appeared that he was there more than others, only on account of his relationship and intimate friendship with Lady Emily, who would often say, that she considered him "as a brother, an elder brother, to whose friendship and advice she owed more, perhaps, than her vanity would be willing to avow;" and

she would add, "Lord William is an instance, my dear Lady Osbourne, that there is no sex in friendship. It would be difficult to find any female who could exceed him in the delicacy and disinterestedness of his friendly attachments. The more you know him, the more you will know this."

Rhoda already thought that nothing could be added to her knowledge on this head; she was persuaded to believe that she now saw Lord William, for the first time, in his true character; and this character appeared to her to unite every quality of the head and heart that could fit him for a friend: ardent, but discreet; partial, but sincere; zealous for others, disinterested for himself. She could not be unconscious of the influence that she possessed over his mind and heart; but the marks of it were so guarded, so respectful, so delicate, that she would have denied to others, as she did to herself, that it partook of the nature of love. For the proof of this, the argument, that when

she was disengaged, he sought her *only* as a friend, she thought unanswerable; and she imagined that she understood why an affection, so warm from its very birth, and now proved to be so lasting, should have been thus bounded. He had found moments wherein to insinuate embarrassment of circumstances, occasioned by generosity to others; family distresses mitigated at his cost; sorrows for the indiscretions of others, which had taken from him all thought or care for his own happiness; and all this with so light a pencil, that though the form, designed to be delineated, remained on her mind, she could not point out the lines by which it had been traced. In fact, the figure owed its distinctness more to the ground on which it rested, than to the strokes by which it was described. It was the vanity of Rhoda, even still more than the profligate skill of Lord William, that produced the effect he sought; it was under the influence of this vanity that she firmly believed herself, even though it would have been

impossible to have explained to another why she believed it, that when he first saw her, he thought her the most lovely of created beings; the creature to whom he could have dedicated his whole existence, but that the imperious voice of duty had silenced the pleadings of inclination: that hopeless of being himself the instrument to raise her to the height of station which she was eminently formed to adorn, his second care had been, not to suffer self-indulgence to interpose even the shadow of an obstacle to the success of some happier man. With this clue, which Lord William had so artfully put into her head, Rhoda could account, very satisfactorily to her vanity, for all that had ever displeased or disappointed her in the manners of Lord William; and by the same means she could understand the more open affection which he now avowed for her. He could no longer be misunderstood; his friendship could now be *only* friendship, and friendship on her part might consist with all her other duties.

Did not Mr. Grantham allow of this friendship for Lady Emily? To her domestic chagrins Lord William appeared to be insensible; he saw, he understood nothing. Of Sir James he seldom spoke; and never, but with respect and esteem. His whole purpose in life, at this time, seemed to be confined to the gratification of Rhoda. A wish expressed in the most careless manner, the slightest hint of any thing that she wanted, immediately produced their object; still more frequently did his anticipation out-run her desire. Books, prints, information, rarities, and baubles of every kind were spread over the tables of Lady Emily's drawing-room, and furnished inexhaustible topics for those evening hours which were now become the charm of Rhoda's life. She lived but while she enjoyed them. The rest of her time was a blank that would have been intolerable, had it not been for the expectation of their return; yet would she not fear Lord William, nor mistrust herself. Another gloss, another veil was

never wanting, when she wished to conceal from her understanding what her senses could not but perceive.

She persuaded herself that she had now fallen into something of that select society which she had originally pleased herself with the hopes of being able to draw around her; something of that rational disposal of time, which had been at once the object of her admiration at Temple Harcourt, and the vision of her hope after she had become Lady Osbourne. It is true that here she was not the first mover; her vanity had not that triumph to boast, but its gratifications were not therefore scanty; and where her taste was so fully indulged, she felt no vanity, and sought no honours.

Had Rhoda followed her own inclination, she would never have left her own house, except to have entered Lady Emily's; but from such an indiscretion, arising from an unconsciousness of intending ill, she was guarded by her less innocent and more subtle associates. Lady Emily

compelled her to appear somewhat "in the world" every night, and Lord William would suggest the epicurism of suspending their favourite pursuits, to render their relish more exquisite.

Lord William was always of her party in public. The openness of his attentions, no less than her general good opinion of him, contributed to lull to sleep all suspicion of any sinister designs on his part. All appeared frank and above board; and in a world, where she heard daily of the unreproved *friendship* of young unmarried men for young married women, and where it was made a point of candor to believe, in spite of the strongest appearances to the contrary, that there was no harm meant, and no harm done, it did not occur to her, that in a connexion so unattended by mystery, and where she knew that all was so perfectly innocent as hers with Lord William St. Quintin, she could incur any censure; and while she thus believed herself secure from the blame of others, she

apprehended no danger from her own sentiments, under a consciousness that, however her taste might delight in the conversation of Lord William, or her vanity be gratified by his devotion, the real affections of her heart, that preference which she supposed Sir James could alone, with justice, reprove, was given to another. But in the mean time she forgot, or neglected to promote, the domestic happiness of Sir James. He did not interfere with her mode of passing her time; he was never of her party in public; and if she thought of him at all, it was to suppose that he was indifferent about her.

CHAP. LXI.



"Is not this man jealous?
I never saw this before."

Shakspeare.

Sir James, however, was not an inattentive observer of what was passing. He had remarked that Rhoda was much oftener at home alone than formerly; that she was more meditative and more retired: yet he knew from herself, that instead of Lady Emily's sharing her solitary dinner in Brook-street, which she had been hitherto accustomed to do, when they were not, either of them, otherwise engaged, the meeting was now always at the house of Lady Emily. He

wondered why this should be so. He questioned Rhoda, who could, however, only give him the same reason which Lady Emily had given her, "that Lady Emily liked the arrangement better."

From others Sir James had heard of "the delightful evenings that were passed, by a happy knot of friends, at Lady Emily's." He inquired from Rhoda who composed "this happy knot of friends;" and heard the names only of those, whom the world agreed to designate, "honourable men,"—all "honourable men and women." "And," said Rhoda, "it is all accidental. I don't know how it has happened. Lady Emily had a cold—I stayed at home with her; Lady St. John called to carry me to Mrs. Thompson's; we seduced her, and kept her with us; and we liked our evening so well that we boasted of it; and then others would come too;—but it is mere accident. We never know when we shall meet, or who will come: I wonder people speak of it at all."

Sir James fancied that in this simple

tale, which was really all the truth that Rhoda knew of the matter, there was something artificial; some wish to lessen the importance, or to shade the charms of a meeting which he had heard described in such glowing colours, and in which he had been assured that Rhoda took much delight; a truth, which, if she did not at this moment avow to Sir James, it was not that she felt any reason for concealing it, but that she thought the pleasures she so highly relished were not such as he could either appreciate or taste; and she therefore forbore to speak of them, as we avoid dwelling on the charms of a prospect to the blind.

But it was not so that Sir James construed her reserve; for he had already begun to believe her capable of art. His brow became contracted; he spoke harshly; Rhoda defended the society; he became irritated, and forbad Rhoda, in the tone of peremptory command, "any more to dine at Lady Emily's house, or

to make one of a coterie of so equivocal a nature."

Rhoda first heard with astonishment, then felt with resentment, and then burst into tears of grief.

"I forewarned you," said Sir James, coldly and sternly, "of the pernicious influence that Lady Emily would obtain over your mind, time enough to have spared you the mortification which you now feel, but you refused to listen to me;—nor has the insight, that you must now have into her character, been sufficient to break an intimacy which, if persisted in, will lead to your destruction.— If you will not save yourself, I must save you, at whatever cost to your feelings."

"Of what do you accuse me? Of what do you suspect Lady Emily?" said Rhoda, trembling with a variety of emotions, which left her less under the control of her reason than she had ever been in her life.

"I accuse you," said Sir James, "of not loving your husband; of neglecting his happiness; of preferring another to him; and I suspect Lady Emily of aiding and abetting the nefarious designs of that other."

"Oh, gracious heaven!" said Rhoda, as her thought, 'quick as an angel's wing,' glanced from the image of Mr. Ponsonby and rested on that of Lord William. "Have I lived to hear this?"

"The proof that you deserve not the accusation," replied Sir James, without any change of voice, "will lie in the readiness with which you give up all intimacy with the company that is so disagreeable to me. I believe that hitherto you have been unconscious of your danger; if you wish to shun it, you will feel grateful for the guardianship I exercise; but if you persist in your present mode of life, I shall have reason to believe that you wish to incur it."

"Danger?—From whom?" said Rhoda.

"From Lord William St. Quintin," replied Sir James.

"From Lord William St. Quintin?—Danger from Lord William?" repeated Rhoda. "Oh, how you wrong him!—How you disgrace yourself!"

"*He* shall not, at least, disgrace me," said Sir James, his under lip quivering with passion.

"Insult me no farther," said Rhoda. "I cannot, cannot bear it." And she would have rushed out of the room.

"Stay!" said Sir James. "I command you to stay! I meant not to have raised this storm—I ought not—for what have I said respecting yourself but what I and you knew too well before? The warning, that I have given you against others, cannot be unnecessary if it be offensive;—it may be your preservation; but, that it may, there must be no violence,—no abruptness in your proceedings. I reiterate my prohibition as to dining at Lady Emily's, and with respect

to those non-descript evening rendez-vous; but, in all other respects, proceed as you have done. Lady Emily may dine here; you may appear with Lady Emily in public; but, if you wish to preserve my good opinion, you will gently, and by degrees, break the ties that are between you."

"Unjust!—barbarous!—cruel!" cried Rhoda, in an agony of feeling that left her no power of reflection. "And how much farther does your disgraceful prohibition extend?" said she, with angry contempt.

"Not a jot farther. I acquit you, even of a thought, that angels might not hear. Break the shackles in which you are held by Lady Emily, and I will trust the rest to your own purity and sense of rectitude."

And saying these words, Sir James withdrew.

Rhoda remained in a tumult of mind which was little short of distraction. It was at this moment, when every angry

passion was alive, when she smarted with wounded pride, and writhed in the agony of too late repentance, and when almost the very wish to do right was extinct, that Lady Emily entered the room.

Concealment, at such an instant, was impossible. She poured forth all her sorrows, all her injuries, and all her resentments into the bosom of her friend; and vowed, while she wept upon that soft support, "that no inducement, no duty should tear her from such a friend, from such a counsellor."

Lady Emily also made her vows; but they were not such as reached the ears of Rhoda. Indignation swelled her heart, and vengeance ruled her mind; but her eye beamed only compassion, and her voice uttered only the sounds of tenderness.

"My sweet friend," cried she, "be composed,—be calm. Your sorrows, I confess, bear somewhat of a harsher aspect than such sorrows commonly assume; but they are not without mitiga-

tion; they are not without remedy. Injuriously as I am treated by Sir James, I can still be just to him. In his consciousness that he does not deserve the jewel he possesses, I admit the apology for the unworthy suspicions, with which he has outraged both you and me.—We cannot be angry with those whom we despise, still less with those we pity;—and if you will allow me to say so, my dear, I really do pity Sir James. He is in a fair way to make himself completely ridiculous, as well as very miserable; but he has nobody to blame except himself, nor shall there be any body else to blame, my dear Lady Osbourne. I appeal to you if ever, by word or deed, I instigated you to contravene the most extravagant whim of this tyrant husband. Never did I before give you reason to believe that I thought him so,—but it would be affectation to dissemble now. He *is* a tyrant,—but, alas! he is your husband;—and unless you are prepared for the bold measure of separation,—a course that I

would by no means advise, you would in that case give up too much;—unless you resolve on this, it will not become your honour to be marked in the world as a headstrong, rebellious wife, struggling who shall finally prevail. You know not, my dear, what a flood of impertinences such a character would let in upon you; nor how the tenderest, the most disinterested of your friends would regret for you such an imputation. Nor must the world pity you: guard the secret that you deserve its pity, as you would "the immediate jewel of your soul." Sir James's prohibitions must be complied with; but let them be so complied with, as that they may appear your own choice. Thus you will best disappoint whatever malice there may be in such arbitrary restrictions; and thus will you best preserve your own dignity. Do not fear but that we can easily find hours in which to indemnify ourselves for the happy *tête-à-tête* dinners, and the delicious evenings that are so barbarously

ravished from us. We owe such indemnification to ourselves; and, surely, we are enfranchised, by the tyranny of our ruler, from all beyond the *letter* of our duty."

"If I *could* think so," replied Rhoda, "I should not be the happier: I cannot *live* a lie:—I would rather, at once, go down into the country, and cry myself into my grave, than bear about 'the mockery of woe,' making pretensions to a happiness that I do not feel."

"You have a strange predilection for martyrdom, my dear," replied Lady Emily; "but I hope to convince you that you may go to heaven upon wiser terms. Come, clear that sweet brow of yours; let him see that you despise the meanness of his suspicions, even while you obey his mandates; and if you suffer him to suspect that even his sacred person does not wholly escape from this feeling, it may make him something more careful how he again offends you."

"Surely," said Rhoda, "this is not the way to conciliate Sir James?"

"Conciliate Sir James, my dear! What Sisyphus labour are you thinking of? Pray let the stone remain at the bottom of the mountain, or you may be crushed by the rebound. No, no, my sweet friend, do nothing that he forbids, but shackle not yourself with scruples as to what he disapproves. Beyond a literal obedience, we are, we ought to be, free agents. If our lords would have the sacrifice of the heart, they should know how to win it; and having won, to keep it: but this is not a husband's art. What are all the matrimonial attentions in the world, compared to the assiduities of such a friend as Lord William?"

"I must intreat, my dear Lady Emily," said Rhoda, earnestly, "that you will not let a word of all this escape to Lord William. I would not, needlessly, grieve his friendly heart; and I should blush to appear before him in the light of a suspected wife."

"You may depend upon my discretion," replied Lady Emily, "as far as Sir

James will allow me to be discreet; in the latter particular most especially, for I dread throat-cutting, and such horrors. But how are we wholly to veil Sir James's injurious imputations, when the consequence must be the sacrifice of those delightful Attic hours, in which we have so revelled? Must female caprice, that broad-shouldered support of every folly, bear the burthen?"

"I should be mortified," said Rhoda, "if Lord William should think me capricious; and yet he must not know how miserable I am."

"The exact degree, my dear," said Lady Emily, "nobody but yourself can tell; for it is what you please to make it. But do you really suppose that Lord William has now to learn that Sir James is a brute?"

"Oh! do not speak so," said Rhoda; "Sir James does not deserve such an epithet. Lord William's delicacy might instruct you better. If he does, indeed, suspect that I am less happy than he

wishes me, never did he wound my ear with the slightest hint of the sort; and for this I esteem him, I think, even more than for all his other good qualities."

"Nor have I been apt before," said Lady Emily, "so to transgress; but, considering how I am implicated in the present injustice, I hope I may be pardoned one wry word."

"Oh! pardon me," said Rhoda; "I am miserable and I am peevish."

"The cure for both is in your hands," returned Lady Emily. "I little thought to have fallen into such a discussion when I flew to you upon the wings of delight and joy. I am enchanted with my new abode; now I breathe the atmosphere that is congenial with me; now I feel once more as I did before matrimony had shorn me of half my beams. I give a little dinner to-day to celebrate my *enlargement*; and I came for the express purpose of saying that you must grace it."

"Who is your party?" said Rhoda.

"Our usual chosen few."

"Then it is forbidden fruit to me," said Rhoda.

"Not at all," replied Lady Emily; "it is neither a *tête-à-tête* dinner, nor one of those non-descript evening rendezvous so candidly stigmatized by your —— I would not offend you, my dear; but really, I cannot just now think of a word that you would like, so let him pass as a non-descript himself. What I invite you to, is an orderly family dinner, given according to the most established rules, with my lady at the head of the table, and my lord at the foot."

"Does Mr. Grantham dine at home?" said Rhoda, eagerly.

"Certainly," replied Lady Emily.

"Would it be possible," said Rhoda, timidly, "to include Sir James in the party?"

"*Impossible!*" returned Lady Emily, haughtily. "Not even my friendship for you, my dear, could induce me so to condescend; it would be to kiss the hand that struck me!"

"Again I ask your pardon," said Rhoda; "I cannot wish you to condescend for me."

"I would compromise any thing but my dignity," replied Lady Emily; "that I cannot do for any body. And do you not see, my dear, that such a step would have a deprecatory appearance; a courting of favour where nothing but defiance is due?"

"I rather thought," said Rhoda, "that it would be a proof of perfect innocence; the means of enabling Sir James to judge for himself, which would preclude all possible mistakes for the future."

"This inviting the enemy into one's camp," said Lady Emily, "may be extremely magnanimous, but it is generally extremely foolish. Who can be sure that he would see things as one wishes he would see them?"

"I only desire that he may see things as they are," said Rhoda; "but I would not press you to do what is disagreeable

to you; the consequence is only that I cannot come either."

"Then I shall quarrel with you," said Lady Emily. "This is a scruple to which I am sure your good sense must be superior:—it is seated in your heart; and if you continue to refuse me, I shall believe that Sir James has infused his odious suspicions into your mind too."

"Oh! no, no; you will not think so," said Rhoda.

"I shall," said Lady Emily: "so take the consequence."

"Then I will come," said Rhoda. "It is true that Sir James deserves little consideration at my hands, and you deserve much."

"That's my sweet friend!" said Lady Emily; "and now let us begone. I long to introduce you into my fairy palace. Lady Hampton has absolutely the best taste in decoration of any body I know; and in her apartments all is enchantment, all is fragrance, and eastern luxury."

Upon a sopha, which united all the enchantment, fragrance, and luxury, of which Lady Emily had spoken, she and her friend, on their entrance into the drawing-room, found Lord William St. Quintin seated, with a book in his hand.

"On my word, this is quite intolerable!" said Lady Emily: "you are as perpetually under one's foot as a favourite cat. What brought you here this morning; and why did you stay when you found I was from home?"

"I came at your commands," said Lord William, "and I stayed to perform them."

He then produced some fashionable toy, which he said that Lady Emily had commissioned him to get for her, and proceeded to exhibit the use of it.

Rhoda endeavoured to busy herself with what was before her, but she was the worst of all possible dissemblers, and after an unsuccessful effort or two she sat silent and abstracted, scarcely conscious

that she was not alone. A whispering conversation, which passed between Lady Emily and Lord William, broke not in upon her reverie until the latter coming up to her, said, in a tone of the most affectionate interest,—"You may depend upon my discretion; my dearest Lady Osbourne. If it must not be my happy fate to contribute to your felicity, I will at least take care not to add to your chagrins."

Rhoda coloured, and looked reproachfully at Lady Emily; but Lord William was gone before either of them could utter a word; and as he shut the door—"Now," said Lady Emily, "you are ready to beat me; but I told nothing: I merely did not deny what Lord William's acuteness and your want of self-command informed him of."

"Oh, how I am humbled!" said Rhoda: "how contemptible I must appear in the eyes of Lord William!"

"You have the most ingenious ways

of tormenting yourself of any body whom I know," replied Lady Emily. "Contemptible in the eyes of Lord William! —Why, my dear, he does every thing but adore you; his *friendship* is the most fervent and the most disinterested of which I ever saw an example. I should envy you, but that I am his cousin, and he is bound to love me second best."

"You treat that very lightly," said Rhoda, "which is to me very heavy."

"It is so, because you will have it so," said Lady Emily. "Why should the innocent be sad? If you will learn of me, I will engage that you shall dance to the music of your chains in a fortnight."

"My self-acquittal is not quite so complete as you seem to suppose it," said Rhoda; "and as for dancing, I think I shall never dance again."

"Oh, yes, you will; you will dance at a ball which I shall give in this dear *bijou* of a house in less than three weeks."

"You give a ball?" said Rhoda.

"Yes, my dear, the funds are provided. I meant to have talked it all over with you this morning, but your mind was not in tune; it will, however, be so in time for my festivity, or you have not the good sense for which I give you credit."

"I must then see things in a different light from what they now appear in," said Rhoda; "and, indeed, I am conscious that I shall make so poor a figure at your dinner to-day, that I wish you would excuse me."

"I will not excuse you; but don't tell tales of yourself as you have done this morning to Lord William. Come with your best looks and gayest spirits, and let Sir James hear from every mouth what an agreeable companion he drives from home."

"I will do my best," said Rhoda; "and that I may do so, we will now part, and I will endeavour, by filling my mind with something the most contrary to my joys and sorrows, to forget both the one and

the other, and come to you, if I can, at your dinner hour, as if nothing had happened this morning to vex me."

"Wisely resolved," said Lady Emily; "and 'to resolve' is, I assure you, in this case, 'to do.'"

CHAP. LXII.

————"Oh, for yesterdays to come!
To-day is yesterday returned;—Returned
Full power'd to cancel, expiate, raise, adorn,
And re-instate us on the rock of peace:
Let it not share its predecessor's fate,
Nor like its older sisters die a fool."

Young.

THERE are, however, circumstances, which will bear down stronger resolves than ever Rhoda could boast. She was ever the slave of accident; and the accidents of this day proved most tyrannical.

The occupation which she had designed herself, to drive away all care, was to look over a number of bills which she had ordered to be sent in. Sir James's allotment for her private purse had been

liberal, but had originally been fixed, though not in the form of pin-money, at a stated sum; and the regularity with which this had been paid, and the reference which Sir James occasionally made to it, convinced her that he did not expect it should be exceeded. A consciousness that her exchequer was low, and that she had many unpaid bills, had produced the resolution to look into the real state of her finances.

The guineas, which she had paid for Lady Emily's house, had nearly emptied her purse, and she wished to ascertain what would remain from the next quarter's payment of her allowance at her own disposal, after having discharged her bills.

What was her astonishment and chagrin on discovering that it was already mortgaged far beyond its value!

At first she was confident there was some mistake. "The thing was impossible! She had been rather economical than extravagant; she had scarcely bought

any thing, but at the instigation of Lady Emily, unless indeed for Lady Emily herself; and under this head the articles were numerous." But a closer inspection of the documents convinced her that they were perfectly accurate; and that though each particular was beyond all reasonable expectation more expensive than she had calculated that it would be, yet she had no doubt but that she had ordered and received them all. Her heart died within her.—In happier days she would not have scrupled, with whatever humiliation, to have laid the case before Sir James, and would have felt assured of his kindness and assistance: but all confidence was now destroyed between them; and at this moment there was scarcely any inconvenience to which she would not have submitted, rather than have added such a proof of thoughtless extravagance to the list of offences with which she stood charged by him, to whose bounty and indulgence she must apply; thus taking

comfort rather from the concealment of her errors than from their reformation!

Yet, to be pennyless! to be in debt!—What worse could have befallen her, if she had *not* bartered happiness and loyalty for gold? And by what means could she extricate herself?—Lady Emily was poorer than herself, nor could she endure to disclose to her a distress that might seem to reproach her for the gifts which she had received at her hands. A thought glanced towards Lord William, but she rejected it, almost before it made itself felt—yet what could she do?

Wilson just then entered the room. "Look over that bill, Wilson," said Rhoda, "and say whether you don't think it extremely extravagant."

Wilson scarcely looking at any thing but the name at the top, and carelessly running her eye over the different items, replied, "Why, really, and to speak the exact truth, my lady, no; I protest I do

not think there is any body in town that is more reasonable in her way than Madam Bertie; and every thing she furnishes is so excellent! so superior!—I am sure, my lady, there is no good in going to cheap shops, and besides it is so beggarly and unlady-like."

"I am not thinking of going to cheap shops," replied Rhoda; "I am rather thinking how I can pay Madam Bertie's bill,—for paid it must be, whether it is reasonable or not."

"To be sure, my lady;—but you, my lady——"

"Can you, Wilson," said Rhoda, taking a sudden resolution from despair,—"can you suggest any means how I can borrow two hundred pounds?"

"Dear, my lady, you come upon one so of a sudden! Bless me, I should never have thought of such a thing as your ladyship wanting money: but, to be sure, I have heard of such affairs before, and I have a brother.—Pray, my lady, give me

a little time; I dare say I can serve you."

"I will repay the money by fifty pounds at a time, every three months; and in the mean time I can put some of my trinkets into your brother's hands as a security; I have so many, that I can part with some of them without any inconvenience, or danger of their being missed."

"Bless me, my lady! I am in such a flutter! I never did such a thing before, and I always said that I would keep out of such scrapes, for I have heard of such plunges, when the gentleman became angry with the lady, and all the jewels were to be produced,—and then, to be sure, all the blame was to be laid on the lady's woman."

"What, what is to become of me!" said Rhoda. "If you, Wilson, who know so much more of the world than I do, are so alarmed, surely there must be something dangerous in what I designed, of which I am not aware."

"Don't be alarmed, my lady," replied Wilson: "to be sure, there is some risk, and I ought to be considered; but I can trust to your bounty, my lady, and my brother is a respectable person— And to be paid so quickly! Well! I am not half so frightened as I was at first. Yes, the thing may be done, and so pray, my lady, be easy."

Rhoda, who now thought that she saw the source of all Wilson's scruples, really became so, as to any danger in what she was about to do, and promising Wilson that she would reward her zeal, she betook herself again to that melancholy meditation or the miscalculation on which the destiny of her life had turned.

She was interrupted by a message from Sir James, desiring to know whether she dined at home.

She questioned whether this attention was in the spirit of peace, or otherwise; and to shew her disposition to meet it, if the former was the case, she replied,

"that if Sir James was disengaged, she would be glad if he would come to her."

The reply was that he was busy, but desired an answer to his question.

Mortified and angry, Rhoda replied, simply, "that she did *not* dine at home, nor should she be there any part of the evening."

Soon afterwards she heard Sir James come out of his room, and leave the house. She longed to recal him; she felt as if she stood on a precipice: she looked on this side, and that; and shuddered at her danger! She recollected the hint that Lady Emily had dropt of a separation; she adverted to her own notion of withdrawing into the country. Fear made her reject the one, and resentment the other. She wished to do right; but she was reluctant to the sacrifice that must attend it,—above all, the sacrifice of her mind; yet she repented that she had promised to dine with Lady Emily:—then again she *disdained* to give up her engagement to a supposed wish of

Sir James, which he had not condescended to explain. She wished she had seen him. Perhaps he might have requested that she would remain at home; she would then have been most happy to have obliged him; but the moment for conferring this obligation was passed; she must either, by staying at home, acknowledge that she repented of the message which she had sent him, or she must keep her engagement in defiance, as it were, of his caution. She was not willing to do either, she took a middle course; she wrote these words to Sir James.

"If you would have done me the favour to have allowed me to have spoken to you, I should have explained, what I could not explain by the footman; this must account for what might seem peremptory in my message. I am engaged to dine with Lady Emily, but not *tête-à-tête*. Mr. Grantham dines at home, and some of his and Lady Emily's friends: there will be no evening coterie, and I shall be to-night in public, with Lady

Emily. All this, I believe, comes within your prescribed limits; and you will always find me equally ready to conform to any explicit commands that you may lay upon me."

The morning was by this time so far advanced, that Rhoda had no longer leisure to brood over her disquietudes. She hastened to her toilette, and as she descended to her carriage she stopt to deposit her note in Sir James's dressing-room, feeling a repugnance to giving such a proof to the servant, that she had any thing of moment to say to him, which he had refused to hear.

On removing some papers, with which she meant so to conceal her note as to draw Sir James's attention to the place, she discovered the case of a miniature picture; she opened it, and saw that it contained a painting of herself, which had been taken immediately after her marriage, and which she knew Sir James had once highly valued, for the beautiful resemblance that it bore to the lovely

features of the original. She fancied that the glass was dimmed and damped: Could it be by the tears of Sir James? She rubbed it till it became brighter, and never, certainly, did she gaze on her own features with more pleasure.

The resentments of Rhoda were ever short-lived.

"Lady Emily may be mistaken!" thought she;—"this face may not yet have lost its powers. Shall I defeat its influence by any indulgence of a resentment, however just? And against whom does my spirit rebel?—Against the man whom I have solemnly vowed to honour and obey. What am I about? Do I mean to throw away at once my happiness and my principles?—I will *not* go to Lady Emily's." And as she said these words, she was almost in the act of tearing her note, when a loud knocking at the door drew her attention to other thoughts, by so unusual an annunciation at that time of the day.

The footman brought her a card, on which was written:

"If Lady Osbourne is quite ready, Lady St. John will be happy to convey her to Lady Emily Grantham's; and if Lady Osbourne intends to have her horses out again in the evening, perhaps she will be so kind as to take Lady St. John to the opera, and set her home afterwards, which will be really a great favour, as Lady St. John's horses must be in late attendance at the house this evening."

"Now, now I must go!" said Rhoda; "my refusal would seem so strange, and Lady St. John would have a thousand suspicions—and Lady Emily would reproach me for betraying myself; and then she would be angry too, and say, I sacrifice those who love me, to those who do not!—and yet,—Oh, I would give the world to stay at home!"

The footman again appeared.

"Lady St. John, my lady, desires you may know that it is very late."

"I come, I come!" said Rhoda, and hastily placing the note under the picture-case, over which she again drew the papers that had before covered it, she hurried to Lady St. John's carriage.

"My dear creature, may I depend upon you for the evening?"

"Oh, yes!" said Rhoda, giving orders accordingly to her servants, and saying to herself, "how pertinaciously these fine ladies can pursue their own convenience!"

CHAP. LXIII.



> "The smile, that sorrow fain would wear,
> But mocks the woes that lurk beneath,
> Like roses o'er a sepulchre."
>
> *Byron.*

Rhoda, remembering Lady Emily's caution, endeavoured to banish from her countenance all traces of what was passing in her mind; but the variety of emotions, through which she had gone during the course of the morning, had faded her cheeks, and dimmed the lustre of her eye. From all, except Lord William, enquiries after her health were again and again repeated. He kept aloof; and while he was unusually silent, she saw, whenever she

glanced her eyes towards him, his looks fixed upon her face, with an expression of tenderness and compassion which she had never noticed before. A consciousness of what was passing in his mind made her blush; and the feeling that she did so embarrassed her. She found it impossible to address him with her usual freedom; and much less acute and malicious observers than those, by whom she was surrounded, might have believed that there was an intelligence between them which they did not care to avow.

Lady Emily endeavoured to veil all this. She gave Rhoda "a miserable cold," and reproached herself with dragging her out when it would have been more salutary to have remained at home:—while, on the other hand, she whispered "that abominable woman will kill my dear Lord William. Never did a man love a sister so well, and never did a sister deserve so little to be beloved. If he were to sacrifice the whole of his fortune and his happiness, as he has already sacrificed

so large a part, he could neither obtain her gratitude, nor redeem her reputation. But take no notice of what I say, only let us endeavour to amuse him; I am sure we owe him many, many hours of gaiety."

These hints, probably, produced little effect upon any but Rhoda. To her, though they did not alter her opinion of the cause of Lord William's gravity, they suggested the inference that Lady Emily apprehended might be drawn from it by others. She felt grateful to her for thus attempting to obviate it; and they led her to exert herself, with increased energy, to clear herself from all suspicion of having any part or interest in this abstraction.

For this purpose she dedicated herself wholly to Mr. Grantham, with whom, although she had little intimacy, she always felt herself at ease, from the affectionate politeness with which he invariably treated her, and from the good opinion that she knew Sir James had of him. To him,

too, she could speak of Sir James without constraint, or the appearance of affectation; and as at this moment she thought more of Sir James than of any other person, it was a pleasure to name him, even in the most indifferent manner. Mr. Grantham seemed equally pleased with the subject as herself; he lamented that Sir James's other engagements had deprived them of the pleasure of his company; spoke of Dorsetshire, and of the delights that Rhoda had diffused through the whole neighbourhood, and pointedly asked her, "if she did not think one week of social intercourse in the country was worth a whole season of the cold-hearted associations of the capital?"

Without making any direct answer to this question, Rhoda's exclamation, "I wish we were in Dorsetshire, now!" reached the ears of Lady Emily and of Lord William, who was seated by her side: it seemed to electrify them both, and Rhoda was immediately assailed on all sides, as though she were dissatisfied with her present compa-

nions; but she felt no embarrassment. The utterance of a wish so consonant, in her particular circumstances, to every right feeling, had given such lightness and spring to her spirits, that she found no difficulty in repelling the attacks made upon her, with equal gaiety and good breeding; yet the saddened brow of Lord William and the reproachful eye of Lady Emily made her think herself unfeeling to the one, and ungrateful to the other. Lord William was silent; but Lady Emily said with an asperity of tone and manner in which she seldom indulged herself, "Pray leave me out of your rusticating scheme; I am not so insensible to the kindness and partiality of such friends as these," looking around her, "as to wish to leave them for much greater temptations than green fields and purling brooks can offer."

"Lady Osbourne's was no bill of exclusion," said Mr. Grantham; "her wish extended to all present, I believe; and whoever has shared the pleasures which

she confers in Dorsetshire will acknowledge that they are not of a solitary nature."

"Nor of a very domestic one either," said Lady Emily, with a haughty toss of her beautiful little head; "but for my part this paltry town will content me."

Rhoda thus rebuffed in the only moment when she had felt any lessening of the oppressive weight which lay upon her heart, sunk again into gravity, only saying in a low voice to Mr. Grantham, "it might have been as well, if *I* had never left green fields and purling brooks."

Lady Emily, whose sudden start of ill-humour had arisen from a fear that Rhoda was about to escape from the snare which she had spread for her, now assumed even more than usual blandishment, and addressed herself by the eye or word to Rhoda upon every possible occasion, till Rhoda, who could be depressed, but who knew not how to be sullen, brightened once more, and repaid her friend smile for smile, till all again was

gaiety and good humour. Even Lord William seemed to shake off his sadder feelings, and to partake of the pleasures of society. As the ladies withdrew, he found a moment in which to say to Rhoda, "How I admire you! But would you really leave us?"

"Lord William," thought Rhoda, "would approve my quitting town. What can I fear from one who is so disinterestedly kind?"

Rhoda felt that Lady Emily had used her ill, and with her accustomed frankness, withdrawing her a little aside, gently reproached her for having counteracted the very effort that she was making in consequence of the advice she had herself given her.

"Oh! you must pardon me, my dearest creature," said Lady Emily; "you know I am a little pepper-pot, and you did so overact your part, that I lost all patience. Who could see any thing but the grossest affectation in a wish to be buried in the country with a man whom

every body knows you have never loved, and who has ceased to love you?"

"I do not believe that Sir James has ceased to love me," replied Rhoda; "and if I could hope that he would continue to love me, my wisest course would be to cultivate his love, and trust to time and the consciousness of doing my duty for my happiness: and so I am sure that Lord William thinks."

"Lord William is such another simpleton as yourself, my dear," replied Lady Emily; "always ready to sacrifice himself for some phantasm or other; but what do either of you get by such Quixotism?"

"I get nothing by the way I am in," said Rhoda: "I cannot live in an atmosphere of hostility; it shall be put an end to, some way or other."

"I do not counsel hostility," said Lady Emily, "I only preach indifference; and if Sir James has not done enough to produce *that*, I wonder what would be enough."

Lady St. John here interrupted the conversation, by asking Rhoda, " at what hour she had ordered her carriage?" saying, that " she did not wish to be late at the opera."

Coffee and the gentlemen soon afterwards made their appearance, and Rhoda's carriage being announced, Lord William, going away at the same time, led her down stairs, and said, as he put her into it, " you will not see me in your box to-night, but you will understand the sacrifice I make, and remember that you are in my debt."

Rhoda, disconcerted by the new tone that Lord William had taken, and by the air of intelligence that he seemed to wish should appear between them, longed to be alone with Lady Emily, to remark on the change that had taken place, and to protest against having any share in it; but the presence of Lady St. John restrained her, and she endeavoured rather to forget than to account for it. His absence, however, and the heaviness of

her own thoughts, made the opera very dull; she longed to have it over: she longed to see Sir James; she thought if he were kind, she would abjure all resentment, and offer that they should return into the country, and endeavour to find their happiness in each other.

But this was to be a day of quick revolution in the thoughts and designs of Rhoda.

While Lady St. John and Lady Emily lingered in the opera room, for another and another interchangement of gossip and of flattery, Rhoda, sitting silent, and a little apart, was suddenly struck with the appearance of Mr. Ponsonby!

Her heart beat:—

"Will he fly me as at first? or will he have the courage, now we are so near each other, to recognize me, as when last I saw him?" were the thoughts that passed through Rhoda's mind in the hundredth part of a second. She had not adverted to another alternative, that he might advance, and speak to her; yet

this was what he did. With a serious, but unembarrassed air, he inquired after her health. Hers was now the emotion; but it was not a repulsive emotion; she trembled, her voice faltered, she endeavoured to re-possess herself.

"Tell me," said she, "of my dear friends at Byrhley: tell me of all of the name of Wyburg."

"I know only one person of that name," replied Mr. Ponsonby; "and he, I thank God, is *now* in perfect health."

"You know only one person of that name?" said Rhoda: "Is my dear Miss Wyburg married?"

"How important," said Mr. Ponsonby, smiling, "are we little people in our own eyes!—I imagined you must have known that Miss Wyburg is Mrs. Ponsonby."

"Oh! heavens!" said Rhoda, and laid her hand on her bosom, as if to still the rising emotion, but the attempt was in vain; the feeling of the moment was, as usual, too powerful for her to contend

with, and after a painful struggle of an instant, she covered her face and burst into tears.

Inexpressibly shocked, Mr. Ponsonby lost not, however, his power of thought.

"How grateful will this proof of your unabated friendship be to Mrs. Ponsonby," said he; "nothing but the conviction that you had lost all interest in her concerns could have prevented the communication of the most important event of her life. I see how she has wronged you; and I beg that I may carry the olive-branch, which will restore harmony between two such friends."

A sun-beam from Rhoda's eye told Mr. Ponsonby that she understood his delicacy, and thanked him for it.

"If Miss Wyburg," said she, "could believe that I was indifferent to any thing which interested her, she did indeed wrong me; but not as I have wronged myself. Oh! I have a heavy score against me, though not of the nature which she, perhaps, believes. My *memory* is not to

blame, yet the fault is mine—yes, mine alone! It cannot even be charged on this busy, this absorbing world! I hate it, and all it has to give!"

Mr. Ponsonby looked on Rhoda with astonishment; he sighed, but he spoke not; she understood the expression of his eye.

"I do not deserve your pity," said she; "but as is the world, I might have been happy in it, if I would. Good night! I must go home. Give my love to Mrs. Ponsonby—may she be as blessed as I am sure she has it in her power to be!"

"Let me lead you to your carriage," said Mr. Ponsonby.

"Oh! no, no! I have no carriage! oh that I had never had a carriage! Good night!" and so saying, she mixed with the crowd, and disappeared, leaving Mr. Ponsonby equally confounded and grieved with such a proof of his power over a heart which he had often doubted whether he had ever been able to touch.

Rhoda seizing Lady Emily's arm, who

was too much occupied with herself, and too distant, to have attended to what had passed, said, " I must go home directly; I am ill. If you and Lady St. John must stay longer, I will send the carriage again."

" What's the matter?" said Lady Emily.

"I am ill," repeated Rhoda; and speaking to a gentleman of her acquaintance, she said, " pray be kind enough to call my carriage."

" We will all go together," said Lady Emily; and away they went.

Rhoda leaned her head, throbbing as if it would have separated in twain, on Lady Emily's shoulder; while to her reiterated inquiries " what was amiss?" Rhoda could only repeat the words, " I am ill."

Nor when they were disembarrassed of Lady St. John could Rhoda be more explicit; for had she been disposed to have explained her feelings, she knew not how to express them, nor knew to

what cause to trace the extraordinary disturbance of her mind.

Lady Emily would not leave her till she saw her at the door of her own house, and then embracing her: "My beloved friend," said she, "how much do I wish that I was not now to quit you! This night can afford me no rest, no peace. My only chance for either would have been to have passed it by the side of your bed; but tyrant fate and tyrant man forbid it: God preserve you!"

"Oh! I shall be better in the morning," said Rhoda, drawing for the first time her breath with some degree of freedom. "Farewell!" said she, giving a parting embrace to her friend.

On entering the house, Rhoda enquired eagerly whether Sir James was at home; and learning that he was not, she hastened to her own apartment, and to bed, ordering Wilson to say that she was ill, and desired not to be disturbed.

When Rhoda was alone, the whole that had passed seemed but the work of her

own imagination; she could not believe there was any thing real in what she had felt, she could even still less understand her emotion than Mr. Ponsonby had done. She knew not till that moment how well she had loved him; she knew not how much the belief that he would even continue to love her was essential to that degree of self-complacency which the continual mortification of her self-love had still left her, nor how much it came in aid to support the hours of gloom and disappointment which now made up so large a part of her existence. But the charm was now broken; the spell was dissolved: she saw that she had found her true level in the estimation of Mr. Ponsonby; she felt that genuine worth and genuine affection had triumphed over the fascination of charms scarcely ever exerted but to give pain.

CHAP. LXIV.

> "If Wisdom is our lesson,
> Grief! more proficients in thy school are made
> Than genius or proud learning e'er could boast."
>
> *Young.*

It was under a sense of degradation which banished from her memory all other causes of vexation that Rhoda passed a restless and feverish night, and that she saw the day dawn, without bringing any mitigation to the bitterness of her reflections.

She arose, and wrapping herself in her dressing-gown, placed herself at her window, which faced the east. Here, as she listened to the dying sounds of more than midnight revellers, or the reviving notices

of wakeful industry, she envied alike those who were about to sink to rest, and those who awoke to labour; all and each appeared happier than herself,—all might have hope to cheer them: But what hope was hers? The visions of her youth had melted into air; and with what had she replaced them? The sun, which now arose above the blackened roofs and chimneys that surrounded her, obscured by the smoke of the rekindling fires, seemed but an emblem of herself—despoiled of all the brightness of the first morning of her days. "Yet that glorious luminary," thought she, "will rise superior to the gross atmosphere which obscures its lustre, and again shine forth in all its native splendour: but how shall I shake off the earthly particles that disfigure the purity of my soul?—and can I love such a creature as I know myself to be? Can I hope that others will love me? With not enough of honest affections to resist the allurements of vanity; without strength of mind sufficient to subdue a

partiality which I had myself rendered criminal; rejecting, like a wayward child, the choicest guardian of indulgent providence, yet meanly envying its possession to her I call my friend! Oh, worthless, degraded Rhoda! Dost thou make a merit of foregoing thy resentment against a worthy husband, who loves thee but too well, who thinks of thee but too fondly, and praises thee less than thou deservest? Dost thou presume to hope that thou canst give happiness to him who, if he knew thee as thou art, must cease to esteem thee?"

These reflections were followed by floods of tears: they were the first that she had shed since those which the sudden disclosure of Mr. Ponsonby's marriage had forced from her eyes; she wept, till she found herself relieved: and the balmy effect of morning air, even though loaded with all the feculencies of a London atmosphere, assisting to still the tumult of her mind, she at length sunk exhausted upon a sopha, and fell asleep.

On returning to consciousness, she found Wilson standing by her, with a face of wonder and dismay.

"Why, my lady, you will kill yourself," said she; "sleeping here with the window open, and so thinly clad! Dear, dear, what can be the meaning of all this?"

Rhoda breathed a deep sigh, and returning recollection brought to her mind all the varied agitation of the past day; the sight of Wilson fixed her attention on her pecuniary difficulties, and she asked whether the two hundred pounds were procured.

"Yes, yes, here it is!" replied Wilson, with much triumph in her countenance: "I would have told you so, my lady, last night, but that you were so ill. You have only just to give me a simple acknowledgment; for my brother says, you are so honourable a lady, he does not wish to have any pledge, or any such low-lived doings, and so you see, my lady, I shall

get into no scrapes, and you may wear first one pretty thing and then another, just as if nothing was ——. I am sure I don't mean to boast, but if this does not deserve a 'bonus,' as the papers say, I don't know what does."

Rhoda put into Wilson's hands a five pound note, and said, she wished to dress.

"But, my lady, what will you say to Sir James? for Saunderson says, he was in a strange fluster last night: quite in a way he never saw him in before. I am sure I hope there is nothing wrong, and that Sir James will hear reason."

"I desire," said Rhoda, angrily, "that I may never hear you speak of Sir James in this manner again. Let Saunderson inform his master that I have had a very bad night, but that I am better this morning, and that I hope we shall breakfast together in the little drawing-room. Let the message be delivered directly, and then come and dress me."

Wilson, little pleased with this repression of her familiarity, that so little resembled the manner in which she had been treated by Mrs. Strictland, went muttering out of the room, and on her return said, that Sir James had breakfasted, but that he would attend Lady Osbourne as soon as she was ready to receive him.

"Then let me be ready as soon as I can," said Rhoda; "but first, go and desire Saunderson will tell his master that I will make all possible haste to meet him."

Wilson again went sulkily away, and returned with the same cloud on her brow; for she doubted not but that Rhoda had a secret, and that she did not mean to intrust her with it.

Rhoda, whose thoughts were fully occupied with her various causes for discomfort, observed nothing of all this; but proceeded to finish her dressing, and to hasten down stairs. She found her

movements impeded by continual shiverings, and a general stiffness in her limbs, accompanied by an intense head-ach, that scarcely permitted her to unclose her eyes. Wilson was too sulky to make any shew of her accustomed officiousness, and seemed not to see any thing unusual in Rhoda's state, 'till Rhoda, seized with a sudden giddiness, caught hold of her arm.

"It is not for me, my lady," said Wilson, "to take notice of any thing I see or hear, that's certain; and perhaps you will be angry again, but indeed you are very ill, and not fit to go down stairs."

"I am better," said Rhoda, after a moment's pause, "and I must go down stairs; but give me that vinegar-box, and let me have your arm."

By these assistances Rhoda reached the drawing-room, but shivering and trembling: a few drops of lavender, however, and closely wrapping her shawl around her, removed these symptoms; and hav-

ing drank a cup of coffee, she thought herself able to see Sir James.

He obeyed her summons immediately, but she no sooner cast her eyes upon him than the shiverings and tremblings returned in a ten-fold degree. Never before had she seen the expression which was impressed upon his countenance, and unconscious as she was of deserving what it threatened, she was ready to fall at his feet, and deprecate the issue.

"You were ill last night," said Sir James, in a voice that pierced her very heart.

"I am ill now," said Rhoda, faintly.

"I see it," replied Sir James, "and I am sorry, whatever may have been the cause."

"It was accidental," said Rhoda, "and will have no consequence if——Oh, do not look so!" cried she, interrupting herself. "I cannot bear such looks."

"Yet can voluntarily deserve them," said Sir James.

"Oh, no! not voluntarily: heedlessly, thoughtlessly, perhaps," said Rhoda.

"Heedlessness, thoughtlessness, so often repeated," returned Sir James, "if it does not become voluntary offence, shews that the will is no longer under the guidance of reason, and that the slave of such capriciousness is no longer worthy of confidence."

"Oh, too true!" said Rhoda, covering her face with her hands, and weeping bitterly.

Sir James stood contemplating her with an air of doubt and irresolution, as if uncertain in what extent of meaning he ought to receive the confession, thus, as it were, extorted from her by the force of truth.

"I would fain hope," resumed he, "that it is not yet too late; but I can trust no longer.—Prepare to return into Dorsetshire within a fortnight; and let the future atone, if possible, for the past."

This was the very concession that

Rhoda meant to have made; the very act of conciliation which she meant to have offered: but enacted as it now was as a duty, and imposed by the irresistible weight of a husband's authority, it lost all merit on her part, and she saw herself robbed of the only proof within her power to give, that she did indeed mean the future *should* atone for the past. Struck with a sense of the ground that she had thus lost, the source of her tears entirely dried up; and she sat in silence, gazing on Sir James, meditating how best to convince him of the sincerity with which she wished to propitiate him, and ashamed to have recourse to verbal securities, which she knew too well would not be credited. At length she said, as she timidly touched Sir James's hand with hers, "Let my future actions redeem my forfeited word. I will not insult you with professions which you have but too little reason to believe."

Sir James withdrew his hand, as from the touch of a scorpion, and saying,

"I accept your test," he quitted the room.

Rhoda remained even astounded by the change in her condition;—here was no longer any question, how far, or upon what terms, she should sacrifice her wishes to regain the good opinion of Sir James: *all* was enacted, and it appeared that all might probably be too little to make the purchase. The heart which she had valued so lightly she would have given the world to have re-conquered; for upon the possession of that heart she felt that now depended her single chance of happiness, and, perhaps, of reputation.

Some darker suspicions than had yet found admission into Sir James's mind, she could not doubt now harboured there; how engendered or infused she could not guess; for since she parted with him the day before, no circumstance had arisen upon which they could reasonably be grounded: she felt the fallacy, the wickedness of Lady Emily's doctrine, that a wife could have a separate happiness from that

of her husband, and be yet repectable. She resolved to abjure all such maxims, and taking her chance of the result, as to all personal good, she resolved henceforth to identify herself as much as possible with all the pursuits of Sir James, with all his tastes, with all his occupations;—to seek no distinction apart from him, and to desire no praise but that in which he might have a share.

Such resolutions had already calmed her mind, even while she was sensible of increasing bodily indisposition, when Lady Emily arrived. She came with all the appearances of the most tender anxiety; but she was, in fact, much more under the dominion of curiosity than of any other feeling.

"Well, my dearest creature, I do hope you are quite well this morning. What could be the matter with you last night? What had happened? Lord William has been telling me the strangest story, and yet he scarce knows of what—something of a fright, an insult that you suffered at

house an entire six weeks yet, if I can manage with Mr. Grantham."

"Take my advice," said Rhoda, with a melancholy smile, "and let Mr. Grantham manage for you."

Lady Emily put up her lip.

"Pray leave me to my own devices," said she; "it will be seen in the long run who can best conduct her bark into harbour."

"I am resolved henceforth to have no pilot but my husband," said Rhoda; "and if we are shipwrecked, we will be shipwrecked together."

"And if there is ever a barren rock, or shifting sand-bank, to which I can scramble and be safe," returned Lady Emily, "take my word for it, that I will, let who will besides sink or swim. Well, but you must not leave London before my ball, I insist upon that."

"I am thinking more of taking my bed than of being able to dance any where," said Rhoda.

"Why,—are you ill?"

Rhoda put her hand on Lady Emily's.

"My God!" exclaimed she, "you are in a fever."

"I don't know that," replied Rhoda: "but I am really quite unable to hold up, or converse any longer."

"Then, my dearest friend, I will sit and watch by you as quietly as a mouse, and nurse you with a care that shall make you well, in spite of yourself. Let me ring for Wilson; she is an excellent coadjutrix on such occasions: she knows what is better for such kind of megrims than any of us. I really envy you so admirable a servant."

Wilson was summoned, and she detailed Rhoda's sleepless night, and morning indiscretion; laid all the mischief upon the open window; prescribed and administered; and Rhoda between her two nurses, being delicately laid upon her sopha, Lady Emily drew down the blinds, and told Wilson that she might send away her carriage, with orders not to return till five, for that she

would watch all morning by Lady Osbourne.

Rhoda could not but be gratified by such a mark of affection from Lady Emily, to whom she knew that the sacrifice of a whole morning's driving about the streets of London was no trifling matter.

"I believe that she does love me," thought she; "and love, from whatever quarter, to such a poor bankrupt as myself is valuable."

Yet she feared that Sir James might consider her admitting this act of friendship as another proof of her perverseness, and wished that she could have escaped from it.

Rhoda being now kept equally warm, and her mind, from the rightness of her resolves for her future conduct, being more at ease than it had been for many preceding hours, soon dropt into a sound and refreshing sleep; and although she awoke stiff, and with all the symptoms of a violent cold, the appearances of any

more formidable disorder were gone. Lady Emily herself prescribed her keeping the house for a few days; promised to visit her every hour that she had to spare, and reiterating her injunction that she would be quite well for 'her ball,' she departed.

CHAP. LXV.

"Teach my best reason, reason: my best will
Teach rectitude; and fix my firm resolve
Wisdom to wed, and pay her long arrear."

Young.

RHODA, thus left alone, flattered herself that Sir James would personally enquire after her health; but he returned from his morning engagements and went out again to those of the dinner hour, without taking any further notice of her than to send to know whether she was better. She eat her boiled chicken alone; and for some hours had no other interruption to the course of her melancholy thoughts than the following note from Mr. Ponsonby.

"Mr. Ponsonby presents his compliments to Lady Osbourne: he leaves town on Friday. If Lady Osbourne will honour him with any commands for Mrs. Ponsonby, Mr. Ponsonby will have the greatest pleasure in executing them."

Rhoda felt an almost invincible repugnance to writing to the wife of Mr. Ponsonby; yet not to write to her Frances was still more intolerable. She could not pardon herself so wanton an unkindness; yet how to say any thing, where she could not say what she felt—and where that which she sought to say was what she did not feel? She ordered Wilson to set the writing table—she pushed it from her; she took up some paper—she threw it aside; she wrote a few lines—she erased what she had written. "Ah, it is too true!" said she; "the will is not under the guidance of reason; and the slave of such capriciousness is unworthy of any confidence! I will no longer be that slave;" and she began to write, and it was thus that she did write:

"May you be blessed, my dearest friend, as you deserve to be, as all must be blessed who enjoy and are worthy of true affection! Oh guard that gem as you would the life-spring of your heart! You know not, you cannot conjecture how forlorn, how unsupported, how death-stricken—but that was not what I meant to say. Love Mr. Ponsonby better than yourself; let there be but one soul between you. Were you to see the husbands and wives—but you would not believe what I could tell you; and why should I tell you? Happy are those who are ignorant that even such things can be! I do not ask you to forgive me: if you saw my heart, if you knew all that has passed there since I wrote to you last, your feeling towards me would not be anger. I would fain hope that the worst is passed. We return into Dorsetshire in about a fortnight. If I can recover my own esteem, I will again lay claim to yours. Love me still, and I desire Mr. Wyburg to pray for me."

The flutter of spirits, which the writing the above had occasioned, was scarcely over, and Rhoda had began to taste the pleasures of this victory over herself, when Wilson appeared, with another billet in her hand: "From Lady Emily, my lady."

Rhoda opened the paper, and read in Lord William St. Quintin's hand-writing these words:

"Pray pardon the artifice I have hazarded. I cannot live in ignorance of your real state. Lady Emily laughs at all my fears; but she does not know what it is to ——. One word to say how you are, directed to Lady Emily, is all that I dare petition for, and surely you will not think *that* too much to grant."

"Who brought this note?" said Rhoda.

"A gentleman, my lady; he did not tell his name: he only said that he came from Lady Emily, and that he would step into the parlour while you wrote your answer."

"What imprudence," thought Rhoda; but feeling that the best thing to do was

not to appear surprised or disturbed, without hesitation, or remark, she wrote upon a slip of paper, "I am considerably better this evening," and twisting it together, directed it to Lady Emily, and gave it to Wilson. Lord William's note she tore into small pieces, and set fire to.

If Rhoda had not yet sufficiently subdued her vanity, so as not to feel some gratification, even from so improper and hazardous a mark of Lord William's attachment, yet her predominant sentiment on the occasion was displeasure; and she would have felt this still more pointedly, had not Lord William, in all respects, lost much of his influence over her thoughts.

The dangers that threatened her, the renovation of all the better feelings of her heart and mind, the new mode of conduct which she had resolved upon, and above all, the ardent desire which her interview with Mr. Ponsonby had awakened, of once more proving herself worthy of the love of her earliest and best friend, left no room, in the heart of Rhoda, for that

species of attachment which she had felt for Lord William. Already he seemed an object removed to a distance from her hopes and fears; he made no part of her present cogitations, and neither the imprudence that he had committed, nor the resentment that he had excited, left more than faint traces upon her memory. Her attention and her wishes were fixed upon the return of Sir James: to see him, to hear him speak, was what she most ardently desired. The expression of his countenance, and the sound of his voice, when they last parted, haunted her imagination; they seemed an "unreal mockery," which must vanish before the true object, whose form and manner they had usurped. Although she was overcome by fatigue both of body and mind, ill, and feverish, it was in vain that Wilson urged her to go to bed. Without declaring her motive, she continued to drag on one half hour after another, 'till strength and hope were equally worn out; and when at length compelled, from mere exhaustion, to com-

ply with the continually renewed intreaties of her attendant, all that occurred to her, as being in her power to evince her present disposition to Sir James, was to write to him in the following terms:

"I take pleasure in believing you will be glad to hear that I am much better this evening. I think I should have been quite well, if I could have seen you look gently, and have heard you speak kindly. I have waited for this balm, 'till my exhausted strength will allow me to wait no longer; but my desire to hear your knock will not, I am sure, allow me to sleep, so that however late you may return, you may come into my apartment without any fear of disturbing me.

"Yours ever faithfully,

Rhoda had not over-rated her anxiety for the return of Sir James; sleep came not near her: and as she counted the passing hours, she thought never night was

so long. At length she heard the wished for signal, and given with a caution, which shewed there was consideration for her repose: her heart beat. The moments that must pass before her note could be given, be read, and produce its effects, seemed to be interminable;—she thought that she had given time for all this to be repeated a hundred times; yet she heard no opening and closing door; no ascending step. All was silent: and after a succession of hope and solicitude, of fear and disappointment, more severe than she had ever before experienced, she was compelled to admit the fact, that Sir James had retired to the small bed which had been put up in the dressing-room, as an occasional resource, in case of indisposition.

No words can express the bitterness of her reflections, on this proof of the annihilation of her power over the mind of Sir James. She knew, that when offended, he did not readily forgive, and that he held it a weakness unworthy of a manly mind to pardon faults voluntarily per-

sisted in, until reformation had given proof of repentance: yet she had flattered herself that she still maintained so much of her original influence, as would have made it difficult for Sir James to have withstood the earnestness with which she pursued her wish to be reconciled to him.

The mortification of self-love, on finding her mistake, was extreme; it awakened anew some sparks of anger, and shook the steadiness of her virtuous purposes.

"What happiness can I give or receive," thought she, "with one who will not be conciliated, and who cannot pardon? But what right have I to expect that on my first concession he should be conciliated, that he should pardon?—Unjust Rhoda! thou hast many steps to retrace; thou hast much humiliation to suffer, much wholesome discipline to undergo, before thou canst reascend that height from whence thy own folly has precipitated thee; and all, alas! perhaps,

too little to correct my proud and wayward heart! I have besought the prayers of Mr. Wyburg; but he will not pray for the proud, the vain; for the criminal who refuses the chastisement which she knows she has merited. If I would benefit by his prayers, I must strive to deserve them.

Rhoda now melted into tears of contrition and penitence, and even these were feelings so much less hostile to repose than those of pride and resentment, that after some time given to the indulgence of this natural relief, her sorrows lulled themselves to rest, and she fell asleep.

She arose early, resolved, if possible, to breakfast with Sir James; and on her invitation to him to do so, heard that he would meet her below: he joined her in the drawing-room. There was little change in his countenance from the day before; yet she thought he spoke more mildly; and he observed with words of kindness, that she looked better than she had done. He adverted not, however, to her note of

the evening before; and he sat silent, meditating her face, as if to ascertain whether the lines which had once shadowed out every virtue had changed their expression.

Rhoda, trembling and doubtful how best to prove the sincerity of her good resolutions, sat silent also; an unwelcome tear sometimes straying down her cheek, in spite of her efforts to restrain it.

At length Sir James said abruptly: "Did you see Lady Emily in the course of yesterday evening?"

"No," replied Rhoda.

"Nor heard from her?"

"No!" repeated Rhoda: but she felt her cheek glow as she said so.

"It is strange!" said Sir James.

"Do you wish," said Rhoda, gathering courage even from alarm, "that I should see her no more? If so, I am willing to comply, and instead of staying another fortnight in town, let us go to-morrow, or the next day:—or whenever you please."

"What am I to understand," said Sir James, "from such a change of tone and wishes; dating, too, from a night of such strange disorder; and such open defiance to the rights that I have in you?"

"I do not understand you," said Rhoda; "I know not what you allude to."

"The opera!" said Sir James: "What say you to the opera?"

"I say," replied Rhoda, with the extremest agitation, "that I there heard Miss Wyburg was married to Mr. Ponsonby; that the suddenness of the intelligence, the consciousness that I had neglected her, the thousand varied feelings that such an event occasioned me, overcame my self-command; and that I betrayed an emotion which probably would appear extraordinary to bystanders; but which had nothing in it offensive." She was going to add, "to you;" but stopped, and trembled so extremely, that she was obliged to lean back in her chair.

"From whom did you hear of this marriage?" said Sir James, with the voice of authority, questioning guilt.

"From Mr. Ponsonby," said Rhoda, in accents scarcely audible.

"And was Mr. Ponsonby the person who spoke to you at the opera; who forced tears from you in the face of the whole world—and from whose presence you fled as from something banceful?"

"It was!" said Rhoda, covered with a confusion so intolerable, that every object seemed to swim before her sight, and the very foundations of the house to shake under her.

"I am satisfied," said Sir James; "nor on that head shall I inquire or wish to know farther."

"Oh," cried Rhoda, in the extremest agony, "I see that I am worthless in your eyes! I see that I have now nothing to offer which you will accept. The humblest duty, the most implicit obedience must be valueless."

"Not on Mr. Ponsonby's account," replied Sir James; "but, perhaps, you are not aware of the disparaging and strange imputations which that unfortunate opera scene has given rise to. They touch alike your honour and my own. These can alone be done away by the appearance of perfect cordiality between us. Were I immediately to carry you into the country, the stigma would be ineffaceable; and could I believe that I now know the worst I have to fear, you should not want the opportunity to redeem your dignity and mine. We would remain another month in town; we would be seen every where together; we would *appear* to be happy in each other: but if you doubt your own conduct, or fear the influence of circumstances, let us be gone immediately. It is better to preserve virtue without reputation than reputation without virtue."

"Oh, kill me not, by supposing so injurious an alternative," said Rhoda. "Both may be preserved, if you will

henceforth take me under your guidance, will henceforth spread your protecting shield before me."

"I will do my part, be assured," said Sir James; "dare you undertake for your own?"

"I dare," said Rhoda.

"I take you at your word," replied Sir James; "but now let us separate,—we have discomposed each other. The delicacy of your frame is ill suited to this strong emotion, and the state of your health makes it the more alarming.—Let the care you take of yourself be the first proof you give that you are willing to be ruled by me."

"Oh," cried Rhoda, with a sudden burst of delighted gratitude, "such I do believe is the only proof that you will ever require; but tell me, tell me, before we part, do you wish me to break with Lady Emily?"

"Certainly not. Lady Emily is what is called a woman of honour; but she is a malignant, she is a mischievous woman:

disengage yourself from her intimacy, but do not break with her."

This was perhaps the most difficult line of acting that Sir James could have marked out. Rhoda felt that it was so: with her it was generally easy to go directly to the point; but she had no talents for management, no power of seeming more or less than what she really was; and she felt it to be disingenuous to maintain the same appearance of friendship, under the determination that she would no longer be a friend, as when the outward form was but the expression of the inward feeling.

The morning was far advanced before Lady Emily put to the test how well she could repeat the lesson which she had been so lately taught; but she came with such a show of friendship and solicitude, that Rhoda, had she been inclined to scrutinize her feelings, could not but have admitted the truth of the sorrow she expressed, on not having been able to come sooner.

The subject, however, which most pressed upon the mind of Rhoda, was the indiscretion committed by Lord William the night before; she spoke of it with just indignation, and desired Lady Emily would inform him, that if any thing similar was repeated, she should be obliged to give such orders to her servants, as would subject him to a very unpleasant repulse.

Lady Emily affected equal displeasure as herself; yet suggested a thousand palliations, and painted his anxiety for the health and happiness of Rhoda as the paramount feeling of his heart.

"I have too long listened to such flattery," said Rhoda, "if not directly from Lord William, yet from you. I will not deny that I have been pleased with it, but I will be so no longer; it is insidious, it is dangerous."

"Danger from Lord William!" exclaimed Lady Emily.

"I, too, have said the same," replied Rhoda, "feeling that to myself—to my

own sentiments there could be no danger—but there is danger to the happiness of Sir James; perhaps to the delicacy of my fame; and such is my opinion of Lord William that I believe he would not willingly hazard either. Let him resume the open and unambiguous manner which so long distinguished his address to me; and any change in which is, perhaps, only chargeable on my own want of self-command when under the immediate influence of ill-founded resentment, and he will at once secure my good opinion, and contribute to my happiness."

"I can scarcely understand what I hear," said Lady Emily, with a look of the utmost astonishment. "Is it possible that I am speaking to the same Lady Osbourne, to that dear and confidential friend, whose heart has been laid open before me for so many months past; and where I read—the most irreproachable it is true, but the most affectionate attachment to a man, who adores her, and

who would die to preserve her from the slightest pain, or to procure her the slightest pleasure?"

"All that *was* irreproachable in that attachment," replied Rhoda, "remains; that it may remain, I would recall Lord William to the conduct which can alone make it so."

"I could not have believed it!" said Lady Emily: "I denied it; I said it was impossible; but I find it true!"

"What could you not have believed, what have you denied, what have you said was impossible, and what do you find true?" said Rhoda.

"What I have no words to tell you," said Lady Emily: "What you will not have patience to hear!"

"I must be told," said Rhoda. "That which you would not believe of me I dare aver is not true."

"A private favourite!—A faithless lover! Lady Williams ———."

"Stop!" said Rhoda; "I know from

whence that infamous story arises; it arises, as all my sorrows do, from my own imprudence; but believe me, and if you love me, tell it to the world, that I have now no heart but for my husband; he has conquered it by indulgence, by forbearance, by confidence."

"I congratulate you, my dear," said Lady Emily, with an equivocal tone that grated on the feelings of Rhoda; "—and so my fair friend is really in port?"

"I hope so," said Rhoda.

"And am I to be turned adrift?" said Lady Emily.

"Certainly not," said Rhoda.

"Well, my dear, and when do you set out for Dorsetshire?"

"I don't know, I believe not this month yet."

"Indeed! I am delighted: Then you *will* dance at my ball, and Sir James shall dance too; and it shall be the celebration of your re-union, or perhaps the first espousal of your hearts; and we will defy all the old cits in London to shew two more

discreet, prettily-behaved, happy wives, than Lady Osbourne and Lady Emily Grantham, in either of our liege lord and sovereign's good and loyal cities of London and Westminster."

Rhoda felt the spirit of disdain and mockery in which all this was uttered; but all littleness of vanity was extirpated. It was not to the applauses of Lady Emily that she looked for any part of the motives that actuated her change of conduct, and she was not displeased to find that the tone, which Lady Emily seemed disposed to take, would make the task of withdrawing from her society less irksome and repugnant to her feelings than she had feared.

"I shall be happy to realize your picture, I can assure you," said Rhoda; "I have now no other ambition than to become a discreet, prettily-behaved, and happy wife."

"Prettily-behaved and discreet, my dear, you have always been," replied Lady Emily: "and if you can still believe in

the exploded notion of married happiness, I am not the person that will attempt to shake your faith. Like that of ghosts, it has some wholesome qualities: but I hope those dismal looks are no part of your new system? You really look shockingly, and I shall lose the brightest ornament of my gala, unless you, or Wilson, can furnish some milk of roses, or Circassian bloom, before Thursday se'nnight."

"May I ask," said Rhoda, "who is really the giver of this ball?"

"My dear, all this I meant to have told you two days ago but the strange way you have been in put every thing else out of my head. Even here you will see a proof of my discretion, for the fact is, that the ball is a little gallantry of —— of my mother!"

"Your mother!" said Rhoda.

"Yes; to tell you the truth, she has been vexed and mortified by the shabby way in which Mr. Grantham lodged me, (for I can call it nothing more), when first

we came to town. She makes it a point never to quarrel with him, and there was just then no remedy; but no sooner did my dear Lady Hampton lend me her beautiful house, than my mother said she was resolved I should do something that should be talked of, before I returned into the country; and she and I decided that nothing could better answer the purpose than a ball, distinguished by the elegance and refinement of its decorations and appointments; and as the company cannot be numerous, the expense will be moderate. It will be a perfect Mahometan paradise—beauties alone will be admitted, but my houris will all be married, for I will have no misses."

"I really think that a very unfair exclusion," said Rhoda.

"Oh, my dear, I shall have enough to do with misses, when I bring out my daughters. At present I must live a little for myself, and the gallantry of a married ball has quite a different air to that

of a husband-hunting assemblage; the men are all so much at their ease, and we are all so well satisfied!—But what do you do with yourself this evening? You have so thrown me out of all my calculations, that I cannot guess whether you mean to read a homily with Sir James, or keep your engagement with me, and weep your eyes out over the enchanting new actress."

"I must stay at home," replied Rhoda; "for in fact, I am still far from well, and as you justly observed, my looks are not such as I can wish to exhibit in public."

"Well, then, farewell; for I must dine early, of course—Lord William goes with me. Will not a little longing for past pleasures recur as you think of us? But, no! I suppose I am to tell him that he must wear the willow?"

"Not in those words," said Rhoda.

"Pshaw!" said Lady Emily: "Don't take me thus, *au pied de la lettre*. Trust me, trust me, I will no more do a wrong

thing than your sweet self; though I don't make quite so grave an affair of doing right."

"After all, perhaps," thought Rhoda, "it is more a manner of speaking, than any thing really wrong, that sometimes startles me in Lady Emily. I cannot believe she *is* mischievous, and I wish Sir James did not think so." The candour of this opinion was probably produced at this moment, by the removal of a suspicion which had found its way into the mind of Rhoda, that the real giver of Lady Emily's ball was Lord William St. Quintin. That Lady Emily would accept such a boon privately from the hands of any man, must have sunk her very low in the estimation of Rhoda; and that Lord William would make Lady Emily so expensive a compliment, unless to promote some view of his own, she did not think very probable. She had a fear that she might herself be some object in the intended festivity, and the nicety of conduct,

for which she had engaged; made her more than usually circumspect. She had resolved that if she found any reason to confirm the suspicion which she entertained, she would, at the risk of whatever imputation, abstain from appearing at an amusement originating so improperly. But Lady Emily's explanation had appeared so natural, and Rhoda had so often heard Lady Wilton express the very opinion and sentiments which Lady Emily imputed to her, that there remained not a shadow of doubt in her mind but that she knew the truth, and the whole truth of the matter.

Sir James looked in upon Rhoda for a moment, before he went to his dinner engagement; advised her to go early to bed, and take every means in her power to restore her health as speedily as might be.

"I would have us appear in public together as soon as possible," said he, "and I would have you appear there with all

your usual brilliancy and eclat. I would have no tell-tale languor in the eye, no paleness in the cheek, give occasion to have it supposed, that while I drag the captive form about, the spirit is elsewhere."

Rhoda, whose ardent temper and warm feelings had made her hope, even in spite of her reason, that the first step was all, and that a permission to prove her repentance was a full restoration to favour, drooped under this proof that all which she had obtained was probation, and not reconcilement; that she was rather to approve herself at the bar of rigid justice, than be allowed to appeal to the partiality of love.

"It is but right that it should be so!" thought the humbled and mortified Rhoda; "but if my judge is to be extreme to mark what is done amiss, how shall I abide the trial?—Oh, how pleasant are the ways of rectitude; how thorny the paths of repentance!"

These reflections were no friends to the gaiety and bloom, which seemed to be exacted from Rhoda as a duty, equally by Sir James and Lady Emily: but in spite of them, the bloom returned, and the gaiety she endeavoured to assume.

CHAP. LXVI.



"This jealousy
Is for a precious creature; as she's rare
Must it be great."

Shakspeare.

Sir James continued to preserve the same serious aspect and measured intercourse in his dealings with Rhoda, which he had at first adopted; but she sometimes saw his eye fill with tears as he looked on her; and his voice would sometimes falter as he announced the arrangements for the day, with more of the dictatorial tone of a master, than of friendly confidence, consulting mutual convenience. Had it not been for these accidental and momentary breakings up of the cloud,

Rhoda could scarcely have supported the horror of the horizon by which she was surrounded; but the hopes of brighter days enabled her to bear up under the gloom of the present hour; and the sad conviction that all was but deserved, so grounded her resolution to do well on the solid foundation of genuine humility, as to stifle the first risings towards complaint or resentment. On her part, she was soft, ductile, cheerful; she would have been affectionate, but she thought she saw that Sir James looked with suspicion on any attempt to conciliate him by any little marks of attachment; or by any appeal to his feelings.

"He will prove my integrity," thought Rhoda, "before he will deign to accept my love!"

To a person of Rhoda's character, the trial, no doubt, was a fiery one. An idol from her very cradle, in all the successive periods of her life, she had hitherto known only adulation and flattery. Highly conscious of her powers of charming, and hav-

ing received the proof of those powers, in the height of splendour to which they had raised her, it could not be without many a bitter struggle that she could submit to a discipline so severe; and rather voluntarily endure the wholesome austerity of a husband resolute to reform, than fly to the blandishments of adulatory partiality, which might persuade her that there was nothing to amend. But a resolution, springing from the Christian principles in which she had been initiated from the first dawn of her reason, seemed as if it would bear her unscorched through the flames.

A week was already passed since the contract between herself and Sir James had taken place. His relenting eye and softened voice told her that the next would have less of hardship. Her name would sometimes escape his lips, when she fancied that he intended to have addressed her by her title, and he would sometimes fall into a tone of familiarity, which was only corrected by a strong effort of his judgment. Whenever he accompanied her

into public, she thought that she saw in him a degree of pleasure in the admiration which she never failed to excite; and she beheld with a tremulous joy that the eye of observation, which had rested on her with so much scrutinizing severity, now frequently beamed with delight, or melted with love. He had allowed of, and sanctioned her promise to attend Lady Emily's ball, by the intention of being present there himself; and two days before that fixed on for this important festival, Mr. Grantham and Lady Emily dined in Brook-street, and went with Sir James and Rhoda to the opera.

Of Lord William Rhoda had seen nothing for the last ten days, unless in public. There she constantly met him, and she could have wished that he would have shewn her the common attentions which their former intimacy authorized; but he appeared studiously to avoid her, as if some crisis had taken place in their connexion, and the interest, which he took in her, was incompatible with the

renewed good understanding between her and Sir James. She would often see him stand with his eyes fixed on her face, in sad and deep contemplation; then, if he saw that she was conscious of his notice, he would shake off his abstraction, and occupy himself with the next pretty woman near him; but even here he shewed the homage that he paid to Rhoda. The respect, the deference, the almost adoration, with which he was accustomed to address her, vanished in a moment, and she recognized in all he said and did the same mixture of impertinence and flattery, of self-confidence, and adulation, with which she had been at once disgusted and attracted, in the first days of their acquaintance.

On the present occasion, Rhoda, on looking around her, beheld Lord William in the box immediately opposite to that in which she was seated, and apparently gay and amused; but his eye no sooner rested on hers than all his cheerfulness fled, and, withdrawing to a less generally

conspicuous part of the box, he placed himself so that he could look at Rhoda, almost without attracting the notice of any one but herself that he did so.

This movement at first appeared to Rhoda accidental, and as such indifferent to her; but when she found that he persevered unchangeably, not only in the station which he had chosen, but in the use that he made of it, she became embarrassed and uneasy, and finding some slight pretence for her desire to do so, she changed seats with Lady Emily.

This movement placed her nearer to Sir James, and put it into her power, without affectation, or the appearance of design, to direct most of her conversation to him. The scene before them furnished the topics; but however trifling the subjects, the ease and familiarity, with which Sir James bore his part, was as the dew of Hermon to the parched and thirsty soul of Rhoda; who longed, as the famished wretch for food, once again to hear the

voice of kindness and of love. When Sir James stooped to address to her some observation, or when she ventured to touch his arm with a finger, to draw his attention to her, her heart lightened; her eyes sparkled, and she felt as if every obstacle to returning happiness was removed.

In this happy disposition, as Rhoda was going out from the opera, leaning on Sir James's arm, Lord William joined them; he spoke obligingly to Sir James, conversed about the opera, talked of the company, and seemed as if he had resumed the very manners that Rhoda so much wished he should adopt. He accompanied her and Sir James to their carriage, and declining Sir James's offer of setting him down, contrived, as he assisted Rhoda to get into it, to slip into her hand a scrap of paper. Her first impulse was to drop it, but the sudden fear that it might fall at Sir James's feet made her grasp it close.

Sir James and Rhoda went directly home; and Sir James immediately withdrew to his dressing-room; but Wilson, who in consequence of her own urgent and particular request had been at the opera, not being yet returned, Rhoda sat down in the drawing-room, and took the opportunity of looking at the paper which Lord William had given her. The writing was in pencil, and seemed to have been suggested by a sudden sense of the impropriety of making her so publicly a mark of observation. It contained only these words; "I acknowledge my error, and will not repeat it; you shall not a second time be obliged to withdraw from my observation."

However pleased Rhoda was with this assurance, and the proof she had just received that Lord William meant to act up to it, the sanguine hopes which she at this moment indulged in, that she was upon the point of re-entering on all her rights over Sir James's heart, and of

possessing his full confidence, made all that Lord William could, or could not do, nearly indifferent to her. She burnt the paper, and thought of it no more.

Rhoda had promised to be early with Lady Emily, for the purpose of giving her assistance in some of the final arrangements necessary to the next day's gala; and immediately after she and Sir James had breakfasted together, apparently with mutual satisfaction and complacency, she went to fulfil her engagement.

She found Lady Emily surrounded by work-people of almost all descriptions, and overwhelmed with decorations of every kind. Lady Emily had a vey just deference for Rhoda's taste in such speculations; and she saw with pleasure her magic hand separate and combine with a facility, and a grace, that could not have been excelled.

The choice thus made, and the orders precisely given, the two ladies adjourned to the only room in the house, Lady

Emily's dressing-room, which was not undergoing some metamorphose in preparation for the next day. Here, as they were still busily and eagerly discussing "ways and means," Lord William slowly walked in.

"Oh, you are abominably late!" said Lady Emily; "and now you move as if you had left your soul behind you. What are you thinking of?"

"My disappointment," returned Lord William: "it is quite impossible to procure the waltz you wanted."

"Then," said Lady Emily, "we must do without it; but let us lose no more time, let us practise what we have! As you are not accustomed to waltzing," added she, turning to Rhoda, "it will be well that you should take a lesson before-hand."

"You know I never waltz," said Rhoda, "and you know that I shall not waltz to-morrow night."

"Indeed I know that you will; there will not be a creature here that will not

waltz. I told you we had no misses;—we are all sober matrons."

"I did not know that waltzing was any proof of sobriety," said Rhoda; "and if it is a necessary accomplishment for to-morrow's festival, pray leave me out, and supply my place with one more worthy of it."

"My sweet friend, what strange kind of prudery is this?" said Lady Emily.

"It is not prudery," replied Rhoda; "but you know I cannot waltz."

"Oh, pardon me!" said Lady Emily; "I know just the contrary. Will you deny that you and I have waltzed together a hundred times?"

"And Lady Osbourne knows," said Lord William, "that I told her long ago she was made for waltzing."

"I shall then disappoint the end of my creation," said Rhoda: "for I shall not waltz."

"Come, come, my dear, we understand your scruple," said Lady Emily, "and

do not wish to over-rule it; but will you let the question be decided by the lord, who from henceforth is to rule your life?"

"It is already decided by the impossibility of the thing," said Rhoda. "Surely, my dear Lady Emily, you would not have me disgrace the elegance of your ball, by my awkwardnesses?"

"That is gross affectation, my dear," returned Lady Emily: "I have more reason to fear your eclipsing all the rest of my guests; but let Lord William be the judge."

"No!" said Rhoda, "you must excuse me."

"It is hard to press Lady Osbourne so closely," said Lord William; "and not quite fair, not to have let her into the secret sooner."

"*Tace!*" said Lady Emily, "there is no secret in the matter.—I am persuaded, my dear, that you understood I expected every body would waltz, as well as I did myself."

"Indeed you are mistaken," said Rhoda; "I knew that there would be waltzing, but not that every body would be expected to waltz."

"Oh, I shall lay no restraint upon any body; but I could not conjecture that you would choose to be so singular, so unlike every body else, since you can waltz, and admirably too."

Lord William, as if not willing to take any further share in the debate, had withdrawn to the piano-forte, and was gently running over a few notes of a favourite waltz.

"Pray *begin* that," said Lady Emily, "and play it regularly; it is the very one that I want to practise to, and here, my dear, you must lend me your assistance, for I can do nothing without a companion. As you cannot play, Lord William *must*, and you must dance with me."

Rhoda felt extremely reluctant to such an exhibition in presence of Lord William; yet knew not how to refuse,

without seeming to make him of too much importance; but she hesitated and coloured.

"Bless me," said Lady Emily, "what can be in your head? Be as much of a log as you please, but do let me lay my hand on your shoulder; for the morning passes, and I have no time to lose."

Rhoda, no longer able to withstand a request so urged, took her place, and while Lady Emily called for Lord William's instructions, and exhibited her beautiful little person in a variety of graceful movements, Rhoda too caught the spirit of the dance, and found herself, before she was aware, waltzing with as much pleasure and interest as Lady Emily herself.

Lord William, amidst a profusion of applause to both ladies, ventured to criticise a part of Lady Emily's performance.

"I could rectify that in a moment," said he, "if you will be so kind as to take my place, and let me take yours. Only

observe Lady Osbourne, and you will instantly see what I mean."

The change was made so suddenly, was to be so momentary, and was in itself so entirely unimportant, that Rhoda thought not of resistance; but she had not made half a dozen turns before the door opened, and in rushed Sir James.

He cast his eyes around the room with the looks of a demon, as if to ascertain the object of his vengeance: then darting a look at Lord William, in which was concentrated all the fury, revenge, and hatred of which the human mind is capable, "You will answer me elsewhere," said he; and again vanished from the sight of the astonished and confounded party.

"Sir James! My dear Sir James!" cried Lady Emily, flying after him; "For heaven's sake listen to me—listen to reason—return. I intreat you to return. What in the name of heaven can he mean?" said she, hanging over the balusters of the stairs, in much agitation, and following him with her eyes.

"Let me follow him," said Lord William: "I can easily explain all. Don't be alarmed; this is a misapprehension that will be cleared up in a moment." And so saying, he ran down the stairs with the quickness of lightning.

"Was ever any thing half so absurd," said Lady Emily, "to go into such a tantrum because he finds his wife waltzing! A thing that happens to every man of fashion in this town every day in the week. Really, my dear," said Lady Emily, returning into the room, "you and I can have no longer any intercourse, if these are the tricks of your madman. There is no pleasure that he does not interrupt; and I dare engage for it, all my arrangements for to-morrow will be thrown into confusion. I do wish——" but here casting her eyes on the bloodless and almost lifeless form of Rhoda, which lay stretched on a sopha before her—"My dearest creature," cried she, "be more reasonable, I implore you. Though I love you for that sensitive heart which

feels every thing so acutely, yet, indeed, if you do not learn to dull its sensation, it will destroy you. There is no reason for such alarm;—even Sir James must come to a sense of his own absurdity. You cannot doubt the calmness and patience of Lord William: and what have you done that can displease Sir James, or that offends your nicest sense of propriety?"

"Pray be so kind as to enquire whether my carriage is here," said the miserable Rhoda, with a voice scarcely to be heard, and gasping for breath.

"My dear, I cannot permit you to go home, till we hear something of Sir James. Lord William will certainly overtake him, and be able to make him hear reason: I expect them both back every minute, Sir James heartily ashamed of himself, and all in a way to be well again, I have no doubt."

"I must go home," said Rhoda. "If Mr. Grantham—if——"

"Be assured, my dear, that Mr. Gran-

tham will do every thing; but there will be nothing to be done, take my word for it."

"I *must* go home. Pray, pray, ring the bell."

"If it will make you easier, my dear, you shall, and I will go with you."

"No, no; I must go alone. But if possible, see Mr. Grantham—he, he only and you know how justly, how truly he may exculpate—may make clear ——"

"My dear, there is nothing to exculpate, nothing to make clear: but all shall be done to make you easy.—Is Lady Osbourne's carriage there?" said she, speaking to the footman.

The man replied in the affirmative; and Lady Emily, making Rhoda rest upon her arm, assisted her down stairs, and even to the carriage, encouraging and comforting her, and promising to see her in the course of the day. Rhoda could only press the hand of her friend, in token of her gratitude; and stepping into the carriage, returned to Brook-street,

with the anticipation of every evil that it was possible should befal her.

Here she could learn nothing, but what served to increase her apprehension and misery.

Wilson could only tell, that immediately on Rhoda's quitting the house in the morning, Sir James had been shut up with Saunderson; that she had heard Sir James's voice loud, and Saunderson endeavouring to calm him; that they had gone out together, and that neither of them was returned; that Saunderson had said to her, as he passed her hastily, the words, "sad work;" and that she had looked unobserved at Sir James as he went from the house, and that she thought he looked like a person out of his senses.

It was not then an occasional paroxysm of rage, excited by seeing her in company, or in a situation which he disapproved, that had produced the effects she had witnessed; but some previously conceived suspicion of an atrocious injury that had brought him to Lady

Emily's, in a state little short of insanity. But from whence such a suspicion could arise, or to what it precisely pointed, she was wholly at a loss to conjecture. The certainty of its existence, however, destroyed all the little consolation that she had endeavoured to derive from Lady Emily's so confident assertions that Lord William's explanation would set every thing in a proper light, and her vivid imagination already placed before her eyes the most afflicting consequences of this interview.

It was impossible to remain inactive, in such a tumult of mind as that under which Rhoda now suffered: yet, what to do, with any hope of mitigation of her evils, it was very difficult to suggest. Mr. Strictland had long left London, and except Mr. Grantham there was not a human being to whom she could apply on such an occasion, and she had no doubt but that Lady Emily had already done all that could be done by him.

Where to find, or even to seek Sir James, she knew not; nor could she apply a remedy to an evil of which she knew not the nature. She now thought that she had judged ill in leaving Lady Emily's, as there it was most likely that the earliest intelligence would be gained; yet a latent hope that any moment might bring Sir James to Brook-street nailed her to the spot. She dispatched Wilson, however, accompanied by one of the footmen, to Lady Emily's, with orders to send back the latter, with any, or without any information, and to wait there herself to be ready to send her from time to time, from moment to moment, intelligence of every thing that occurred.

When left to herself she continued to walk backward and forward in the drawing-room, in a state of distraction; and on the sight of a billet from Lady Emily, she was seized with so violent a trembling as to be scarcely able to break the seal. It contained only these few words:

"My dearest creature, I have nothing to tell you. Lord William is not returned. I have sent a hundred ways in pursuit of Mr. Grantham, but hitherto without effect. You shall hear from me the moment that I have any thing to report."

CHAP. LXVII.



"Oh! the dark days of vanity, while here
How tasteless, and how terrible when gone!"

Young.

In this state of excruciating suspense Rhoda continued many hours. Lady Emily sent not; Wilson came not: and the only reply that she received to the repeated messages which she sent to Lady Emily's was, "that nothing had been heard."

At length Wilson appeared with a second billet from Lady Emily; its contents rather increased than lessened the astonishment of Rhoda.

"I am not at liberty to tell you all that I know. To-morrow every thing will be explained. You will better understand than I can express, why I do not offer to share with you the horrible night that you must pass. Do me the justice to believe that I sincerely pity you; nor would I add to your sufferings by my reproaches; but you have strangely abused my confidence——"

"Order the carriage. I will go instantly to Lady Emily's," said Rhoda.

"Pray, pray, my lady, don't go," said Wilson, earnestly.

"Not go to Lady Emily? Why not?" said Rhoda. "I must, I will."

"Indeed, indeed, you will repent it," cried Wilson.

"What can this mean? I insist upon an explanation."

"You would not like to be refused admittance, my lady."

"Refused admittance? By whom? Not, I'm sure, by Lady Emily."

"Yes, indeed, my lady, by her; I know she will not receive you."

"Merciful heaven!" cried Rhoda: "What can all this mean?"

"Nay, my lady, you should know best, for your ladyship knows you never took me into any of your secrets, but just about the money there; but I believe that Mr. Grantham has seen Sir James, and, as far as I can learn, there are strange stories going; but, perhaps, your ladyship knows yourself innocent, and let be what will, I will stand by you to the last drop of my blood."

"Go, go," said Rhoda, "to Mr. Grantham: tell him, that if he would save a fellow creature from destruction, I implore him to come to me directly. I know he will not refuse me: he would not, if I were the wretch that he believes me to be."

"But then, my dear lady, will you take something? Will you try to compose yourself? Really this will never do; you will kill yourself quite."

"Go, go," repeated Rhoda; "I can take neither rest nor sustenance till I have seen Mr. Grantham."

Wilson performed her commission, but she did not find Mr. Grantham at home; she left, however, Rhoda's urgent message with Lady Emily, who promised to deliver it the moment that Mr. Grantham returned.

Rhoda remained in agonized expectation till after the clock had struck twelve, and had almost consigned herself to despair, when a gentle knock at the house door reached her ear.

"Fly," cried she; "that is Mr. Grantham. Fly, Wilson, and bring him to me instantly."

Mr. Grantham entered with a grieved and very serious countenance, which, when he perceived the havoc that a few hours of such extreme misery had made in the appearance of Rhoda, instantly took the expression of the tenderest compassion. But Rhoda was alike

unmindful of her own haggard looks, and the effect that they had upon Mr. Grantham. She felt not even the humiliation of being suspected: vindication was the single idea that possessed her mind.

"Tell me," she cried the moment that she beheld him, "tell me of what I am accused, and who are my accusers."

On a question so unexpected, Mr. Grantham looked as much confounded as Rhoda could have done had she been guilty: he hesitated; he stammered.

"Surely you cannot be at a loss; you cannot want to be told."

"I want to be told all and every thing," replied Rhoda. "My ignorance is as complete as it is torturing. I left this house this morning mistress of the affections and good opinion of my husband: I re-entered it a few hours afterwards despoiled of both—hated—calumniated,—without having voluntarily committed a single fault, or sinned against even his most trifling wish."

"My dear Lady Osbourne," said Mr. Grantham, "do you confine your defence to what has passed this morning?"

"All that had passed before was forgiven," replied Rhoda.

"Did Sir James know all that had passed before?"

"All," said Rhoda.

"It is inexpressibly painful to me to go on," said Mr. Grantham: "excuse me from the task, and tell me how I can serve you."

"You can only serve me, by enabling me to search this cruel mystery to the bottom," said Rhoda. "Ask me what questions you will: prove me—try me—rack me, if you please; and if I deviate from the truth, or criminate myself, then leave me without pity to the disgrace and degradation that I shall deserve."

"This should be the confidence of innocence," said Mr. Grantham; "but is it possible that Sir James can have known and pardoned all that occurred previous to this morning?"

"He gave me every reason to believe that he had," said Rhoda.

"Did Sir James know and pardon a visit, which Lord William St. Quintin made you, when you were too ill to leave your room? Did he know and pardon a paper —a billet that Lord William gave you last night at the opera? Did he know and pardon the having received from Lord William St. Quintin two hundred pounds to pay debts, so extravagantly incurred that you durst not let them come to your husband's knowledge?"

Rhoda started from her seat, and rung the bell violently.

Wilson attended.

"From whom," said Rhoda, with a voice of authority, "did you procure the two hundred pounds which you brought me for the purpose of paying my bills?"

"From my brother, my lady;—that is, I suppose so. I am sure I thought no other *then*."

"Have you ever had reason to think otherwise since?" said Rhoda.

"Bless me, my lady, what can all this mean? I hardly know what you would have me say."

"Don't equivocate," said Mr. Grantham, sternly.

"Why, no;—why should I? My lady's innocent as a new-born babe, and I am sure that I knew nothing of the matter, but that it was hardly likely that my brother, who is but a poor man, should have the money quite by him at such a push; and I know that he had dealings with more gentlemen than one; and if there was any one gentleman that was my lady's particular friend,——"

"Oh! Wilson," cried Rhoda, "you have undone me! Is it possible? Can this infamous story be true?"

"What is true, my lady, but that you received the money as from my brother? I thought no other; and if I *have* said, that I wondered you should think so, and that it was more likely to come from another quarter, somebody, to be sure, that

did not want security, and your ladyship knows that you gave none, I wonder what busy body has gone and told Sir James, and made all this mischief; for I am sure, odd as it was, your ladyship did not suspect but that my brother lent the money, and I'll say this in any law court in England."

Rhoda, now quite overcome, sunk back on the sopha in speechless agony.

"Did Lady Osbourne," said Mr. Grantham, "give any acknowledgement for the money so procured?"

"To be sure she did; a promissory note, it is called, to my brother; to the person who my lady thought had lent her money."

"Can that promissory note be produced?" said Mr. Grantham.

"I know nothing about it," said Wilson: "this is strange questioning. My lady is innocent, and that's all I will say farther; I don't know what traps you are laying for her, and I will not be aiding and abetting."

"Tell all that you know," said Rhoda; "I charge you tell *all;* truth must acquit me; it is only falsehood that I fear."

"Go," said Mr. Grantham to Wilson; "I believe that you have already told all the truth that you will tell."

"My dear Lady Osbourne," said Mr. Grantham, the moment that Wilson was gone, "I am distressed for your distress, but it is useless thus to struggle against facts, where the evidence even of your own agent must condemn you; and if the money were out of the question, what would you say to the clandestine visit, what to having received such a note, as could not have been addressed to an innocent woman?"

"I say," cried Rhoda, the spirit of self-defence giving her strength, "that I never did receive any clandestine visit; I acknowledge that, without my concurrence or my privity, Lord William was one evening at my house, that he sent me up a note written by himself, but which he told the servant he had brought

from Lady Emily. Under that impression I opened it; I read it; it was only an enquiry after my health, which I answered in one word, and directed the unsealed paper to Lady Emily. I mentioned these particulars to Lady Emily at the time; and if this is the clandestine visit with which I am charged, and I know of nothing else that in the smallest degree can bear so disgraceful a designation, you will grant that whatever impropriety attached to the transaction, I had no share in it."

"This may be so," replied Mr. Grantham, "and, if it stood alone, could not criminate you. But what," said he, laying a paper written in pencil on the table, "what do you say to this?"

Rhoda cast her eyes upon the paper, and felt as though a dagger struck through her heart. She read these words, written in Lord William's hand:

"I but too well understand the schooling of that lovely eye, and will in future

be more discreet; but, oh! my lovely tyrant, what a scene did you condemn me to witness! It had the fascination of the basilisk; and with the poison in my heart, I go to speak to you with indifference, to fawn upon——See your power over me, and think what demands I have upon you."

"This paper was never addressed to me," said Rhoda; "I never received it: It was either designed for some other person, or is an infamous machination to ruin me."

"Did you receive any note?" said Mr. Grantham.

"I did; but not this."

"May I ask what became of the one which you did receive?"

"I burnt it: oh! that I had not! It did not contain a syllable that I should have blushed to have exposed to the whole world."

"Yet this paper was taken from the stairs leading to your bed-room."

"Impossible! Impossible! I burnt the

paper which I had received in the drawing-room."

"Oh! my dear Lady Osbourne!" said Mr. Grantham, recoiling, as it were, from so bold a falsehood, and yet with a pitying accent.

"I adjure you," cried Rhoda, in the tone of agonized distraction, "I adjure you, by the most sacred name that the lips can utter, to believe me! As I must stand at the seat of judgment, I never saw that writing before!"

"Yet Lord William does not deny but that it might be his, and addressed to you. He acknowledges that he did write you a note, something to the purport of that, but that his mind was in much agitation, and that he will not be answerable for the exact words. At the same time he confidently affirms your innocence, and loads himself with the heaviest accusations of the most unpardonable indiscretion and folly."

"I disdain his acquittal!" said Rhoda: "He is a villain, and I know him too to

be such: but too late, too late to escape from his snare!"

"Not if you are innocent."

"I am undone!" said Rhoda. "Who shall restore me to the affections of my husband? Who shall give me back the fairness of my past fame?"

"Time may do both. Break off from this moment all connexion, all intercourse with Lord William."

"Break off!" said Rhoda; "I never had any."

"Your future conduct must be the proof of that," said Mr. Grantham.

"And does Sir James believe me," said Rhoda indignantly, one spark of her native spirit breaking forth from under the load of humiliated and self-mortified feelings with which she was oppressed, "does Sir James believe me the infamous creature that you, with so glowing a pencil, have delineated me?"

"I will deal very candidly with you," said Mr. Grantham. "Sir James has no wish to entrap or mislead you, by keep-

ing you in the dark as to the extent of the knowledge that he has obtained. By the indiscretion or the treachery—for I begin to suspect that there is treachery somewhere—of your servant, Saunderson's suspicions were first awakened. He could not but observe the disquictudes of his master, and hoped, by drawing all he could from your attendant, to be able either to remove all ground for them, or to fix them upon such a foundation as would justify Sir James in getting rid of the cause. The nocturnal visit of Lord William had not escaped his notice; he charged Wilson with it; she affected to deny that she knew the person of Lord William, yet said enough to make Saunderson believe there was some mystery concealed under so unusual a proceeding. I would not pain you," said Mr. Grantham, interrupting himself, " but at the very moment that this circumstance became known to Sir James, his——I hate to say the word, my dear Lady Osbourne; you, whom I always thought so free from

any such imputations—but his jealousy was turned into another channel. Your frankness, your ingenuousness upon this point, while it showed him too clearly that he had never possessed more than the outward form, made him believe it to be impossible that any but *one other* was more fortunate than himself. He subjected you to a severe trial; you appeared to stand it well; and at the moment when he flattered himself that he was going to be a happier husband than he had ever yet been, he was overwhelmed with such accumulated proofs of——"

"Of my baseness," said Rhoda, with a smothered and sepulchral voice.

"I hope not," said Mr. Grantham; "I earnestly hope not: but he thought, he could not but think, that there was an improper connexion between you and Lord William. Some words that your servant dropt, when you intrusted her with money to pay bills, gave Saunderson a clue for inquiry, which he pursued till he believed that no doubt remained but

that the two hundred pounds were advanced by Lord William with your knowledge and consent, and that the intermediate person, a supposititious brother, or something of that nature to your Wilson, was merely to be forthcoming as a blind, if any unlucky accident led to the discovery of the transaction."

"Well!" said Rhoda, listening with an attention that amounted to agony.

"Saunderson hesitated whether he should destroy the dawning of Sir James's recovered happiness, by communicating such a death-blow to his hopes and peace for ever; perhaps he might have determined upon concealing it, had he not found upon the stairs leading to your bed-room the very paper which now lies upon that table: he could scarcely doubt from whom it came, or to whom it was addressed. He gave it to Sir James; and all that followed cannot surprise, and ought not to offend you."

"Do I know *all* that followed?" said Rhoda, with an affected calmness, which

spoke, even more than all the vehement and varied emotion she had before manifested, the sense she had of the completeness of her ruin.

"What I have not expressed," replied Mr. Grantham, "I should suppose you cannot be at a loss to conjecture."

"And cannot the consummation of all that is desperate, mad, and wicked, be by any means averted?" said Rhoda.

"I greatly fear not. Lord William must answer, if not for the accomplishment of his designs, for the guilt of having formed such."

"I will detain you no longer," said Rhoda: "I thank you for your patience with me."

"I cannot leave you in such a state of mind," said Mr. Grantham.

"It cannot last," said Rhoda.

"I beg you will go to bed," said Mr. Grantham; "I shall bring you happier news in the morning. I must believe that you have been betrayed, not seduced. This cloud will pass away; or

burst only on the heads of those who have raised it."

"Perhaps so; let me not keep you from your home—your rest; *you* may have both."

"So may you," my dear Lady Osbourne; "tell me that you believe you shall."

"Yes! there *is* a rest for all!"

Mr. Grantham paused—hesitated—made a few steps towards the door—returned, and again took his seat by Rhoda.

"I am most reluctant to leave you," said he.

"Thank you," said Rhoda.

"And yet I may perhaps be more useful to you elsewhere."

"Go!" said Rhoda: and Mr. Grantham, affectionately pressing one of Rhoda's hands between his, bade her good night, and departed.

Rhoda continued through the remainder of this miserable night motionless and silent: her eyes fixed upon one spot,

and giving no other symptom of life than sometimes by a convulsive shiver, and at others by a deep-drawn sigh. Wilson attended her with much assiduity, and after a vain attempt to draw her from the state of abstraction into which she had fallen, quietly watched near her, giving her from time to time some essence to smell to, and covering her with shawls, when her shiverings seemed to indicate the sensation of coldness; or arranging cushions, to give that ease to the body which the mind would not suffer it to take.

CHAP. LXVIII.



"Think you in your soul the Count Claudio hath wronged Hero?
Yea, as sure as I have a thought, or a soul."

Shakspeare.

Mr. Grantham had received from his conversation with Rhoda a strong impression of her innocence, and thought that if he could draw from Lord William some elucidation of the mystery of the note, he might be able, if not to prevent the impending duel, yet to direct its aim from avenging the dishonour of the husband to the vindication of the honour of the wife—a change in the feelings and the purposes of Sir James, which, on the supposition that the strife he was

about to enter upon did not end fatally, might restore both himself and Rhoda to happiness.

He went immediately to Lord William's house, where his occupations preparatory to the intended contest of the following day he knew would probably still make him accessible, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour. On sending up his name, he was accordingly admitted immediately; and Lord William coming from an inner apartment, received him with all the urbanity and good breeding possible.

"I am confident," said Lord William, "that I owe this visit, at such a moment, to the humanity of your nature. In what direction do you wish to exert it?"

"In behalf of all the parties concerned in this most unfortunate affair," replied Mr. Grantham. "I come from one whom I am inclined to believe the most innocent, and certainly the greatest sufferer."

"Oh the angelic creature!" said

Lord William, "she is all innocence. I am alone to blame. I have said it ever; I shall never say otherwise."

"She particularly asserts," said Mr. Grantham, "that she burnt the paper which you gave her at the opera."

"What she asserts she believes," said Lord William; "but that she is mistaken there is unfortunately but too positive a proof—and how easy is it to conceive that she might destroy one scrap of paper for another!"

"But she affirms," said Mr. Grantham, "that the paper, which was found, was not the same which she received from you, and which she read."

Lord William smiled, with a kind of indefinable expression, which left Mr. Grantham at a loss what inference to draw.

"I have said," replied Lord William, "that I was in a state nearly of distraction when I wrote that paper; that the purpose was to promise submission to her wishes; but that I cannot charge my

memory with the exact terms in which it was couched. Might not there be something of a correspondent disorder in the imagination of the fair Rhoda, which would make the same words bear a very different sense at different moments?"

"At no time," said Mr. Grantham warmly, "could the words, which that paper contains, be addressed by any man to a woman whom he believed innocent, or be read without indignation by any woman who knew herself to be so."

"Grantham," said Lord William, "you know not, you cannot know the madness of a passion such as mine for that incomparable woman. From the first moment that I beheld her she became my fate; yet I was little aware that the simple, unformed rustic would rule me so despotically. I confess that I had at first no other intention than to amuse myself with her, as I had done before with dozens of her silly sex; but she soon made me feel her power, and as I could not marry, I thought to find my safety in

flight. That I might not injure her better prospects, I kept aloof till she became Lady Osbourne: I then hoped, that, without danger to my peace, I might see and converse with her; or (for I would be candid) I might perhaps hope that as Lady Osbourne I might receive more favours from her than I could expect while she remained unmarried, and I did not seek her as a wife. I hoped this the more—for with you I shall not use the affectation of modesty—because I was not unaware that she was flattered by my devotion, and that her ruling passion was the love of distinction; but even this universal misguider was not powerful enough with her to tempt her beyond the narrowest line of propriety. I might boast that hitherto my conquests had been made more in the style of Cæsar than of Fabius; but *here* I advanced not a step, though I manifested to the conscious beauty a deference, a respect, an awe, which none of her sex had ever received from me before, and which I believed

to be particularly to her taste. I was piqued; I sought to discover the cause of this coldness in something beyond a sense of duty to a husband, whom I was persuaded that she did not love. I believed that I had discovered this cause; and I again withdrew from under her influence. Absence, however, had not its usual effect; Lady Osbourne continued to be to me "the morning star of memory." We were much together in the Isle of Wight. I found her still more dangerous as a domestic companion than even the most beautiful female on whom my fancy had ever doated. Grantham, you will, perhaps, despise me—but I was more genuinely in love than I had ever been in my life. Such a folly at my years was sufficiently ridiculous; but I added another to it: I fancied that I could blow up a kind of platonic flame in Lady Osbourne's breast, which she would not be unwilling to indulge, and which might keep that burning in my own with-

in the bounds of—virtue, I suppose I must call it. We met again in town: Lady Osbourne was unhappy; I saw that she took pleasure in my conversation: I believed my purpose accomplished. At this moment a strange revolution occurred; the *unknown* appeared again on the stage. I was convinced that she could love; my hopes became more audacious; but at this instant a still more unlooked for change took place. Sir James appeared every where again with Lady Osbourne; Lady Osbourne declared that she had no heart but for her husband! I felt myself baffled, circumvented, undone—remember that I am making my confession, not my vindication—I became mad; yet I strove to hold the reins of my passions; I resolved all that I ought to have done, and I did every thing that I ought not to have done: but oh last night! The scene at the opera! The triumphant husband! The humbled wife! I could have

stabbed them both! It was at such a moment that I wrote the accursed note, which has ruined the reputation of the woman whom I love better than life, or happiness, or fame!"

"You may still repair the injury," said Mr. Grantham: "an explanation as candid as this which you have made to me, if made to Sir James, may restore Lady Osbourne to her reputation, and to her happiness."

"I owe it not to him," returned Lord William; "and the man, who can have known Lady Osbourne as he has known her, and yet suspect her virtue, deserves all the torture the suspicion can inflict. I have already asserted her innocence in terms as strong as language can combine; but he chooses not to believe me. He has taken a fancy to shoot me through the head; and if he does, I shall forgive him: but be assured that I have no intention of paying him the same compliment. An angel withholds my hand;

and yet I owe him a vengeance more than a single death can pay."

"You, my lord," said Mr. Grantham, "are not surely the injured person."

"Be what I may," replied Lord William, "you would not, I am sure, counsel me merely to depreeate the vengeance of Sir James, and, like a cringing schoolboy, whine out a base confession, in hopes to escape correction."

"The reparation of an injury, designed or perpetrated, is nothing akin to a base confession," replied Mr. Grantham.

"This is no time for such musty morality," returned Lord William; "the hour is of a darker complexion. Grantham, if I fall, do you do justice to Lady Osbourne; if I live, Sir James has played my cards so well for me, that the game may yet be mine; and so good night. The hours that remain will scarcely suffice for that which should be done, and which, if not done to-night, I may never do."

Mr. Grantham withdrew; grieved, yet scarcely disappointed with the little success which had attended his efforts to clear up the mystery of the note. Of the innocence of Rhoda from all actual guilt he felt no doubt; but while there subsisted such a discrepancy between the fact and her assertions as to the disposal of the paper which she had received from Lord William, he could not divest his mind of an apprehension that there was an understanding between them which could not consist with the duties and the obligations of a wife. The circumstance of Lord William being acquainted with the particulars of her pecuniary distresses, whether she had allowed of his assistance to relieve them or not, strengthened this belief. He hesitated whether he should again see Sir James, and, by endeavouring to weaken his opinion of the guilt of Rhoda, give some chance that the prosecution of his vengeance against Lord William might be at least suspended; but he had no new fact to bring

forward. The testimony of Lord William was no more than what every gentleman would have given in a similar case, and could have no weight with Sir James; and when last Mr. Grantham had been with him he had found him so strongly prepossessed with the belief not only of the infidelity, but of the treachery and duplicity of Rhoda, whose sudden change of manners and conduct towards him he connected with a consciousness of having something to conceal, that it seemed impossible the voice of reason, or of compassion, could be heard during the present paroxysm of grief and indignation.

Mr. Grantham endeavoured to flatter himself that a more favourable moment would be found, when these violent emotions had a little spent themselves in the meeting which was to take place the following morning between Sir James and Lord William. To the event of this meeting Mr. Grantham looked with little distinct apprehension of its consequences;

the frequency of such rencounters, with the infrequency of any fatal issue, blinded him to the danger, and the more so, as he was assured that on Lord William's part nothing would be pushed to extremity.

"To-morrow," said Mr. Grantham, "I will again renew my work of reconcilement, and probably with better success than I could hope to do to-night."

He was not in the confidence of either of the intended combatants. Sir James had referred himself to an old friend, of his own standing in life; one who, like himself, had starved, from the fear of being poisoned, and who now consoled himself for the disconsolate state, to which he was reduced, by making it an article of his creed that every married man was a dupe or a wretch. To prejudices such as these suspicions, much more extravagant than those entertained by Sir James, would have been "confirmation strong as proofs of holy writ;" and in a heart unsoftened by the exercise of conjugal affections no

"compunctious visitings of nature" could arise, to arrest the hand of vengeance and of chastisement.

With such a friend and counsellor did Sir James pass the intervening hours between his first impulse to revenge and the moment in which it was to be consummated; while Lord William had also chosen for his associate, in the same tremendous appeal, a man the counterpart of himself—profligate, self-confident, reckless of consequences, but brave, gay, and spirited. Mr. Grantham being, therefore, not called upon for any offices of friendship to either side, and being hopeless, at this time, of rendering any service to the miserable Rhoda, returned to his house. Here he encountered Lady Emily, whose interest in the transactions that were passing had kept her also from home till this late hour. Her solicitudes had not, however, been quite of the same nature as those of Mr. Grantham: she had been to seek counsel among the wise how far the possible events of the ensuing day ought

to affect the splendid gala, which was destined to distinguish the evening of it from all other evenings; and she returned well satisfied with the decision of the judges.

It had been decreed that there was but one possible case in which it would be necessary to give up the ball, and this was the death of Lord William; that of Sir James could have no effect whatever, as it would involve no change of dress on the part of Lady Emily: and as to the wounds of either or both the gentlemen, these might furnish topics for conversation, but could be no possible reason why Lady Emily should disappoint two or three hundred of her particular friends. From this statement Lady Emily easily saw how much the chances were in favour of the ball being given, and she had of course returned to her house with a mind much disburthened, and with a resolution not to countermand one order which had been given for the next day.

In the exuberance of her satisfaction,

she even condescended to make Mr. Grantham a partner in it; but he was shocked with her want of sympathy in the sorrows of those from whom she had parted only a few hours before with every profession of attachment. He did not conceal from her his thoughts.

"Pardon me," said she, "for Sir James I never had, nor can have, any sympathy: he deserves all he fears, and if the life of Lord William was not endangered, I should rejoice in all that he suffers. For the frailty of his wife I could have all the compassion she could deserve; but her hypocrisy I cannot pardon."

"She is innocent," said Mr. Grantham.

"She is artful," replied Lady Emily, "and has drawn my dear Lord William on, by her sanctified coquetry, to the loss of his happiness, and it may be to the loss of his life. Can I love or feel for such a woman?"

Mr. Grantham made no reply, for he had none to make which would not have

provoked such a rejoinder as it was ever his especial care to avoid. He withdrew to his own apartment, there to meditate on the materials of which those female hearts were composed that could thus stigmatize a sister in misery, and could thus withdraw from the falling fortunes of a friend. His own heart was made of "softer stuff;" and such were its workings at this moment, that late as he sought rest, he found it not.

CHAP. LXIX.

"Oh, what men dare do!—what men may do!—
What men daily do!"

Shakspeare.

Mr. Grantham arose early, and went out to seek intelligence; it reached him too soon. The tale was short and dreadful.

The offended and the offender had met. The death-stroke, aimed by the former, had missed its mark; it had been refused to be returned; and the enraged and disappointed husband, exclaiming, "Oh, bungler, thus I punish thee!" had snatched a yet undischarged pistol, and had shot himself through the head.

Rhoda had remained for several hours in the same aberration of mind in which Mr. Grantham had left her. At length she seemed to recollect her scattered thoughts: she breathed more freely; she spoke, she adverted to the hour; enquired whether Mr. Grantham had returned; and listened to every foot that approached the house, with an intenseness of impatience that allowed of no other feeling.

A knock, and Wilson's being called from her, threw her into agonies of torture. Her return was immediate, introducing the well-known intimate friend of Sir James, Mr. Willoughby. The first glance of his eye revealed his story, and Rhoda fell lifeless at his feet.

Before the cares of humanity had restored her sensations, Mr. Grantham arrived. He had no sooner recovered the shock, which the first intelligence of the fatal event had occasioned, than he hastened to afford to the wretched and undone Rhoda all the consolation and support in

his power. From Mr. Willoughby he became master of every particular that had occurred, and he learnt from him the precautionary measures, which had been taken by Sir James, to ascertain and limit the claims that Rhoda might have upon his property in case of his death.

Mr. Grantham heard with surprise and pain to what narrow bounds these claims were restricted. The power which Sir James, from a presentiment of the imprudence of his choice, had reserved in his own hands, he had used as an instrument of chastisement, and a mark of his reprobation of his unfortunate wife. Reclaiming all the splendid bawbles, with which his lavish fondness had once delighted to adorn her, he allowed her right to nothing more than what could accurately be comprehended under the term apparel: and ordering all her debts to tradespeople of every description to be fully and immediately discharged, he left her one hundred pounds, to be paid im-

mediately on the event of his decease, and four hundred pounds per annum, in quarterly payments.

"Is it possible," said Mr. Grantham, "that the most violent resentment, the most acute sense of ill-rewarded fondness, could so supersede the natural generosity of Sir James's disposition? Is this a provision for a woman, to whom his very indulgence has made the most luxurious accommodation necessary? Is it possible that he could wish to add the inconveniences of poverty to the pangs of a wounded spirit?"

"Four hundred pounds a year," replied the rigid Mr. Willoughby, "is not poverty: it will allow of more than the decencies of life, and is no niggard gift from the hand of a man, who has been made miserable, and now lies murdered by the woman who is to receive it. When we consider what Lady Osbourne was, what she is, and what she will probably become, I cannot believe that the generosity of my poor friend will be called in

question, by any other than the gentleman to whom I have the honour of speaking."

Mr. Grantham's heart was full; but it was with sorrow, not anger.

"It is not for you and me, Sir," he replied, "to discuss this question; and I assure you that I have no desire to quarrel with the dearest friend of Sir James Osbourne; a man whom I too loved, and who, if he had not by his own rashness intercepted the blessings that heaven had in store for him, might now have been rejoicing in the affection of an amiable wife, not perpetuating punishment for crimes never committed. Lady Osbourne, Sir, is innocent! I will stake my life upon her innocence; innocent, I think, even of any tendency to that of which she is accused: certainly, of all perpetration of guilt, of all connexion, correspondence, or mutual understanding, with Lord William St. Quintin.—His lordship will himself tell this to the world."

"I must do him the justice to acknow-

ledge," replied Mr. Willoughby, "that he made such a declaration, when refusing to return Sir James's fire: he said that he never had injured him, and that he never would injure him; but what was his expression? 'That there was a guardian hand over his head which shielded him from the effects of his resentment.' These words were fatal to my friend: What husband could endure to live under such protection; and who will believe in an innocence which has no other evidence than the testimony of a partner in the guilt?"

"Be assured," replied Mr. Grantham, "that there is much other evidence; but it comes too late to be of service to our unhappy friend; and I fear, too late to restore the reputation of his most unfortunate wife. It will, however, be my future care to preserve this if possible;—her life, her senses must be the objects of our present solicitude. May I intreat you, Sir, to permit me to break to her all the miserable circumstances of this most hor-

rible transaction, and all its consequences to herself? Perhaps she may better endure to hear them from my mouth, than from one, with whom she has not yet conversed on this painful and humiliating subject."

"You cannot do me a greater favour," replied Mr. Willoughby, "than to take upon yourself such a task. I shrunk from it with horror, and nothing but the reverence that I bear to the memory of my lost friend would have enabled me to go through with it."

"How long," said Mr. Grantham, "may Lady Osbourne be permitted to remain in this house?"

"The shortest possible period that can accord with the regard due to her present distress;" replied Mr. Willoughby.

"I can easily believe that *this* will make no part of her hardships," returned Mr. Grantham: "every object here must stab her to the heart."

Mr. Willoughby then, giving Mr. Gran-

tham his address, and desiring that he might hear of Lady Osbourne in the course of the day, took his leave, and Mr. Grantham ordered Rhoda to be informed that he was in the house, and would wait upon her whenever she chose to admit him.

"Immediately," was the answer.

Mr. Grantham, who could have marched with more courage up to the mouth of a cannon, followed the servant to Rhoda's apartment.

"Tell me, tell me all!—Tell me every thing!" said she, with a wildness of voice and look, that struck him with horror;—"and let me see all, all that is left of the man that I have murdered!"

Mr. Grantham sat down by her, and finding it impossible to restrain his tears, as he pressed her hands to his lips, he bent his head over them to conceal his emotion. The attempt was vain; and the sight of his tears had the most salutary effect on Rhoda. She too wept, and as

her tears fell copiously, her intellect became clearer, and her power of self-command returned.

"It will be expedient, my dear Lady Osbourne, that you should quit this house as soon as possible; every thing here must remind you of what you have lost. I go to prepare an asylum for you, and during my absence I intreat that you will think only of what may tend to compose you. At some future time, when you can better bear the recital, you shall be informed of all that you wish to know."

"I resign myself to your direction," said Rhoda; "in no one thing will I act contrary to your advice."

Mr. Grantham acknowledged the obligation of her docility as it deserved; and left her for the purpose of procuring an apartment to be prepared for her in his own house: but he found this beyond his power, unless as the alternative of Lady Emily's quitting it.

No argument that he could address to

her reason, no appeal that he could make to her heart, could convince the one or soften the other.

She would herself, she told him, be the guardian of her own honour; and, if he were careless of the contamination that she must incur by receiving so tainted a member of society under her roof, it the more behoved her to be attentive to her own purity. She had been deceived, abused, duped; she was already a by-word, a laughing-stock, for not having seen that which was obvious to every body else:—she could alone redeem her own character, by casting off unequivocally, and for ever, the person who had brought it into danger. Decorum, dignity—all required it at her hands. Lady Wilton was of the same opinion; but she did not deny that the outraged feelings of her heart had some share in her determination.—Her relation, her friend, the friend of her childhood and her youth, had been made miserable, and even his good name called in question, (though the

generosity of his own conduct had indeed nobly redeemed that) by an artful woman, and it would kill her to be obliged to endure that woman in her sight.

Mr. Grantham, with all his habitual command of temper, could scarcely preserve the calmness which he considered as due at once to a female, and his own character, on such proofs of the malignity of a heart which once he had hoped to have made the repository of all his cares; and reserving for a future hour the execution of a resolution which he then irrevocably formed, he withdrew, only telling Lady Emily that she imputed art to the wrong person, and that it was from *more* than the guilt of a common seduction, that Lord William would have to acquit himself.

On going to his own apartment, he found every preparation for the purposed gala proceeding, as if no extraordinary event had occurred; he hesitated not to put a stop to so unfeeling an indecency; and writing a few words to Lady Emily,

to say that he had done so, and that his prohibition was absolute, and not to be shaken, he left the house.

His first care was to provide a proper and commodious lodging for Rhoda, and the next, how best to devise means to inform her of the extent of all the horrors which had attended Sir James's closing scene, and the melancholy reverse in her own fortunes. But in the first part of this information he found himself anticipated by Wilson. On his reproaching her for having so ill obeyed his injunctions, she replied, impertinently, that "she knew what she was about; and that the best consolation Lady Osbourne could receive, was to know that Sir James did not fall by the hand of Lord William St. Quintin."

Mr. Grantham, shocked by this insinuation, more, if possible, than even by the sad catastrophe which had given rise to it, entered the apartment of Rhoda, with all his prejudices of the day before renewed and strengthened. But he had no

sooner cast his eyes upon her, than he saw the falsehood of Wilson's assertion; and, convinced in this instance of her double dealing, he doubted not but that there was treachery in her conduct with Rhoda. The present, however, was not the time in which to prosecute such an inquiry; and his compassion for Rhoda, reviving with tenfold force, from the momentary injustice which he had done her, left him no thought but how to mitigate the extreme sufferings under which he saw she laboured.

Her lovely features no longer gave her the same countenance, which in all its varied expression had never before failed to charm: her eye, glazed and fixed, spoke nothing but horror and despair; her rigid brow and fallen cheek shewed that the muscles had lost their power, and her livid and quivering lips, that the blood had retreated to its last citadel the heart; yet her senses were still perfect; nor did she seem conscious of increased suffering since last they parted.

Her lips moved as if with an attempt to speak; but finding the effort fruitless, she invited him, by a motion of her hand, to place himself by her, and remained silent.

"My carriage is at the door, my dear Lady Osbourne: allow me to accompany you, where a change of objects may enable you to recover the power of thought."

Rhoda would have risen, but her limbs failed her.

Mr. Grantham directed Wilson to assist in placing her in such a manner upon the sopha, as that she might be carried down stairs upon it with the least possible inconvenience.

"What are you going to do with my lady?" said Wilson, "taking her away without clothes, or comforts of any kind?"

"Speak not, stir not!" said Mr. Grantham, "till I give you permission." He then rang the bell, and calling for the assistance of a footman, between them they carried the speechless and unresist-

ing Rhoda into the hall, and from thence raised her from the sopha, into Mr. Grantham's carriage, on the front seat of which she was laid. He made Wilson step into it also, and then followed himself.

"These are terrible moments, my dear Lady Osbourne," said he, as he hung over her, with the tenderness and sympathy of the fondest brother; "but they will soon be over. Endeavour to support yourself under a trial, which I am fully persuaded that you have not deserved."

A faint change of expression in the eye of Rhoda shewed that she felt the consolation which these words were intended to convey. She put one hand on Mr. Grantham's, and pressed the other to her heart, as if appealing to that seat of consciousness for the truth of what he said.

"I understand you, my dear Lady Osbourne; and it shall not be my fault if you are not generally understood."

Rhoda shewed the sense which she had

of so much kindness, by a gentle pressure of the hand on which she had laid her own.

By such kind and skilful management, the distressing removal was accomplished with less misery to the unhappy sufferer than Mr. Grantham had dared to hope. Indeed, such was the degree of desolation and horror, which at this moment possessed the mind of Rhoda, that place and circumstances were indifferent, and if Mr. Grantham had conducted her to a prison, she would have entered it without reluctance, and almost without advertency.

When they arrived at the lodgings provided for her, Rhoda was able in some degree to assist herself in leaving the carriage, and by the help of Mr. Grantham and Wilson, to drag her trembling limbs upstairs to the apartment prepared for her. Here, being once more laid upon a sopha, Mr. Grantham remained in silence by her side, till she had a little recovered the exhaustion which these efforts had produced. He then spoke.

"Will you direct your servant to deliver to me any keys which may be necessary to enable me to collect every thing that belongs to you? This shall be done in the presence of your house-keeper, and all carefully and faithfully delivered to you here. I act for Mr. Willoughby."

"Give my keys," said Rhoda to Wilson; and the kind heart of Mr. Grantham rejoiced to hear her voice once more.

"Now, my dear Lady Osbourne," said he, "I have one more favour to ask; I have appointed your physician to be in waiting, and he is in the house. For the sake of the many that love you, pray see him, and second his efforts for the preservation of your health, by exerting all the power that reason and innocence ought to have over inevitable evils."

Rhoda burst into tears; and Mr. Grantham felt himself repaid for all his humanity.

Mr. Grantham withdrew, and the physician was admitted. He no sooner learnt that Rhoda had never taken off her clothes

during more than the last twenty-four hours, nor swallowed any sustenance, than he ordered her immediately to bed; and, prescribing such other means for her relief as his skill and his humanity suggested, he promised to see her the next day, and left her to seek that repose, which he scarcely expected she would find.

Mr. Grantham again called in the course of the evening, but understanding the strict injunctions that had been given that the most perfect quiet should be preserved, he contented himself with intrusting a friendly message to Wilson, giving an assurance that he would attend Rhoda again the next day.

Nor was it possible that any thing could exceed the care and assiduity with which Wilson attended and nursed her unfortunate lady. No entreaties on Rhoda's part, not even the voice of authority, could force her to quit the side of her bed through the night, and she administered medicine and sustenance so judiciously,

and so skilfully soothed the feelings, and quieted the nerves of Rhoda, that this dreaded night passed over with less of horror and suffering, than it would have been reasonable to have hoped.

CHAP. LXX.



> "'Tis policy, and stratagem must do
> That you affect; and so you must resolve,
> That what you cannot as you would achieve,
> You must perforce accomplish as you may!"
>
> Shakspeare.

The cares of Wilson, however, were not confined solely to the restoration of the health of Rhoda.

It can scarcely be necessary to say that she was the hired and zealous instrument of Lord William St. Quintin's villainy. From her he had learnt every movement of Rhoda's mind, every shade of discomfort or disagreement that clouded her matrimonial happiness, which her art or observation could make her mistress of. With this purpose and design,

she dropt those hints by which Saunderson became her dupe, while he believed her to be his; and she sowed those seeds of distrust and jealousy, which appeared to spring alone from the discovery of actual facts. It was she who placed that false note, which so largely contributed to the ruin of Rhoda, so conspicuously in the way of Saunderson, that it was impossible he should not find it.

Lord William had been led into so nefarious an act by the madness of despair and disappointment. He had considered Rhoda as his own, and at the very moment when he believed that he had secured his victim, he saw it snatched from his toils by the re-establishment of peace and love between the husband and the wife.

He had viewed, with the pleasure of a demon, the progress that he had made in the mind and good-will of Rhoda, which had not been produced more by the dissatisfactions she received from Sir James, than from the pleasure which she derived from Lord William's conversa-

tion; and to increase her sensibility to both, he could not have found a more able coadjutrix than Lady Emily. Not that she allowed herself to understand, and still less avowedly to promote any acknowledged designs, which, as she phrased it, "virtue could reprove"—"any thing really wrong;" favourite words with Lady Emily, to which she was careful never to affix any precise meaning. But to be revenged upon Sir James for his former slights, and present ill opinion, and to lower Rhoda in the estimation of the world, while she raised herself by the more unsullied character which she maintained, had become the governing desires of her mind; to the gratification of which, all scruples, that even her blunted sense of right and wrong would sometimes feel, gave way. She hated Rhoda for having been, as she thought, more fortunate than herself, and she envied her for the superior splendor of the situation which she filled in life. She knew that, under the mask of friendship, no one could be a more active

agent in her ruin than herself; she had little doubt but that the evil which she wished the world to impute to Rhoda would take place: and she knew the activity that her counsels and society could give to the principles that would work her ruin. Hence her solicitude to remain in town,—hence the *tête-à-tête* dinners, hence the *attic* evenings, hence the various ways she devised to seduce the senses and corrupt the heart of Rhoda: but she saw with surprise that the growing domestic discontents with which Rhoda was assailed, however they lessened her happiness, did not weaken her virtue; and hence she sought to increase the appearance of evil, as the likelihood that it would be incurred decreased. Lord William and herself came to something of a more understood intelligence; and he furnished the funds for that entertainment, which was designed to have been an almost public declaration of the *friendship* subsisting between him and Rhoda.

Rhoda's sudden stop in the career of hostility to her husband disconcerted all these designs, but operated at the same time as a motive to quicken the movements of her enemies;—hence arose Lord William's more open distinctions, and the more undisguised professions that he hazarded; and hence the final explosion of the note, from whence he hoped that she would be thrown into his arms, before she had firmly secured herself an asylum in those of her husband.

The strange indifferency to the most tremendous consequences, which is generated by a long continuance in the ways of vice, had made Lord William view the awful account to which Sir James called him, more as a means to exalt his own character in the opinion of the world, than with any apprehension for himself; and as his malice towards Sir James extended no farther than to rob him of the affections and honour of his wife, the giving up the chance of shooting him

through the head was less a sacrifice of any feeling, than a compliment to his own superior generosity, while it furnished ground for some future demand on the favour of Rhoda. The rashness of Sir James he certainly had not calculated upon; but when the momentary shock which such a scene could not but occasion, even to the nerves of Lord William, was over, he saw all the advantages that might result from it to himself. The possibility of reconcilement was gone, and the disposition towards Rhoda, in which Sir James died, would probably have made his final dealings with her harsh. Lord William had established his own claims as a generous foe and an honourable lover; and what might he not hope from so many concurrent circumstances in his behalf?

Lady Emily, who believed Rhoda lost beyond redemption, no longer concealed her hatred, nor set any bounds to her malignant calumny; and to Lord Wil-

liam's imagination Rhoda appeared cast upon a heartless world,—degraded, unprotected, friendless!

Could he doubt but that she would accept the only protecting hand that was held out to succour her; or refuse to listen to accents of kindness from the only mouth that opened to utter them? It was to be Wilson's task to prepare her for the acceptance of such consolations, and to instil into the mind of Mr. Grantham, whom Lord William regarded as the only remaining obstacle to the accomplishment of his designs, an opinion that some secret intelligence subsisted between Rhoda and himself.

To forward the latter purpose, he visited the house to which Rhoda had been removed several times in the course of the first evening; affected mystery in the discourse which he held with the mistress of it; recommended her lodger to her most assiduous care; promised high pecuniary rewards, and gave a foretaste of his bounty, by putting into her hand a

ten pound bank-note, with an earnest entreaty that she would be watchful over the interests of a lady, who was dearer to him than life.

When the physician visited Rhoda the day following, he found her so extremely debilitated, that he forbad her to leave her bed; and as her intellects were wandering and unsteady, and every sound threw her into terrors, he again inforced the necessity of absolute quiet. Wilson undertook for this, and maintained her point so authoritatively, that she would not permit Mr. Grantham to put one step upon the stairs, but delivered her report in the parlour, and in whispers. Towards Lord William she was much less rigid; she admitted him into the drawing-room, suffered him to remain there for hours together; and sometimes allowed him the privilege of hearing the faint voice of Rhoda from the adjoining room.

The difference, which she made between the two visitors, was so marked,

that she was questioned by the woman of the house whether the gentleman, who was admitted up stairs, was the brother of the lady; to which Wilson had replied, a brother,—or something dearer than a brother.

These proceedings continued a week; when the woman, who, on the word of Mr. Grantham, believed that she had let her lodgings to a person of character, alarmed by such suspicious circumstances, and some reports that had reached her, began to be seriously uneasy; and she attempted to come to some elucidation of the truth, by observing, in answer to Mr. Grantham's repeated recommendation of Rhoda to her respectful care, "that the lady was in no danger of being neglected, for that her brother visited her every day, and was admitted certainly into the drawing-room, if not farther."

Mr. Grantham started at this information, with a look of extreme consternation; and questioned the woman with such eagerness of desire to discredit the report,

as plainly to convince her that the visitor was an improper one.

"For my own part," said she, "I do not know the gentleman, though I have my suspicions who he is; but if you, Sir, will remain where you are a little longer, you may yourself see him go out of the house. He has been above-stairs for more than an hour; and as it is near the time when the doctor generally comes, I am sure he will be gone soon, for he takes good care that they shall not meet."

Mr. Grantham hesitated whether he should accept of such an offer; but before he could decide what he ought to do, the matter was decided for him. He heard the drawing-room door open gently, and a cautious step steal down stairs, through the passage to the street-door. He looked after the person who issued from the house, and knew him to be Lord William St. Quintin!

On such a proof of the duplicity and depravity of Rhoda, his heart sunk in his bosom. He endeavoured to conceal from

the woman the effect which this incident had upon his mind, but she read it too plainly in his countenance.

"As you recommended the lady, Sir," said she, "she shall remain here till she is something better:—but then, I hope, Sir, you will not be offended if I let my lodging to somebody else."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Grantham; and was going away with a sense of disappointment on his mind, which he remembered scarcely ever to have been exceeded. The arrival of the physician, however, determined him to await his report of Rhoda's health; and he would have heard it with much satisfaction, had he not been, at that moment, much more solicitous for her moral than her physical welfare.

"The lady may now see any of her friends singly," said the physician; "but it would be well still to use caution, and neither expose her to the effect of too many voices at a time, nor to discuss any subjects that may be affecting to her:—

it has been a work of difficulty to keep her reason steady."

"Pray, Sir," said the woman, "how soon may the lady safely leave this house?"

"If there was a necessity for her removal," replied the physician, "with proper care, she might be removed to-morrow; but it is more expedient that she should continue where she is for some little time longer."

"Let me petition for another week," said Mr. Grantham: "by that time the lady's health will be more confirmed, and by that time I shall have terminated all the business that I have with her."

The woman, on this representation, acquiesced; and Mr. Grantham and the physician left the house together,

CHAP. LXXI.

"Oh teach my soul the lowliness it needs!
That genuine penitence vouchsafe to give,
Which mourns the past offence, and shuns the future."

More.

Mr. Grantham retired, mortified and grieved beyond expression; doubtful what he had best farther do, and equally reluctant to give up or to continue his intercourse with Rhoda.

Some hours of deliberation brought him to the resolution not to see her again, unless at her own request; and therefore, instead of visiting her next morning, he wrote her the following letter:

" Madam,

" I am desired by Mr. Willoughby to transmit to you the inclosed, and to inform you that a similar sum will be paid you quarterly—the first quarter becoming due this day three months. All remaining debts to trades-people will be paid, and the wages of your own attendant, up to this present day. I presume you are aware, that, from a clause in your marriage settlement, you were at the mercy of Sir James. I have taken care that all, which personally belonged to you, in Brook-street, has been conveyed safely to the house in which you now are; and I send herewith all the keys belonging to the trunks, &c. in a box, locked, and sealed with my own seal. The property which is yours, remaining at Osbourne Park, will, with equal care and faithfulness, be transmitted to whatever place you may appoint. Of this property, it pains me to add that you will be permitted to retain only what can rigidly come under the desig-

nation of wearing apparel. The jewels, and every thing that has been worn as ornament, although not strictly jewels, must be returned. I prefer leaving the selection to yourself, being persuaded that it will be made with a spirit of justice, rather exceeding than falling short of what any other person would exercise.

"I had intended to have made this communication personally, but it may be less painful to you to receive it in this form: it will be more especially so, if, as I have reason to believe, my services have been superseded by others more acceptable to you. If this should not be the case, or if better thoughts should revive, I beg you to believe that I shall, at any moment, be ready to obey your summons, having no wish more fervent than to see you respectable and happy.

"I am, Madam,
Your very humble servant,
"FREDERICK GRANTHAM."

Rhoda read this letter with a sensation

of astonishment and anguish, that left her for some moments no power of reason.

"Is it possible?" cried she. "And does he then abandon me,—and for what? What other does he mean? Have I another friend in the world but him?"

"I hope so, my lady," cried Wilson, "or I am sure you are poorly off. I saw, by the footman's saucy looks, what was likely to be in the letter. Mr. Grantham, and Lady Emily, they are both alike!—She never to come near you; and he now saying I don't know what to vex you! But never mind them, my lady;—don't let such false friends hurt you. Oh, Madam, I could tell you of a friend!—but I am sure your ladyship can guess who—there is no other such; and if you had seen him on that sopha, ready to die when you were at the worst ——"

"Who—what—when? What are you talking of?" said Rhoda.

"Ah, Madam, this is no time for dissembling: Sir James has taken care to ruin you with every body else. But I am

but a poor advocate: if you will read this letter, you will find it a different kind of a thing to that cruel one from Mr. Grantham, which has discomposed you so."

For a moment Rhoda, struck dumb by shame and astonishment, gazed on the infamous emissary with a look of amazed indignation, that made her guilty eye sink under Rhoda's inflamed one.

"How dare you—how did you presume to suppose—Begone!—Never let me see you more!"

Thus, in broken sentences, did Rhoda attempt to give vent to emotions, which swelled at her heart, and seemed to threaten it with breaking.

Dear, my lady," said the odious Wilson, recovering her own presence of mind, as she perceived that Rhoda had lost hers—"don't flurry yourself so. This letter would make all well: and who would have thought that any thing from his lordship would have been so unwelcome? Do, my lady, drink a drop of water, and give

yourself time to think. There is not a lady in London that is happier than you may be, if you please. Such a friend—such a lover! Ah, Madam, you may be the envy of all the Lady Emilys in town, if you will."

"Oh, degradation—oh, misery!" said Rhoda, putting aside the glass with her hand, and clasping her hands together in agony—"what a wretch I am!"

"Indeed, my lady, this is quite out of the way; and I am sure, when my lord comes home to-night, he will soon persuade you that it is."

Rhoda rung the bell with violence.

"Go—begone!" said she to Wilson: "go, before I have you turned out of the house."

Wilson, who saw that Rhoda's detestation of her infamy was genuine, took her part, with all the characteristic insolence of menial worthlessness.

"Oh, as for going," said she, "I can have no objection to *that:* but you will pay me first, I hope."

"Pay you!" repeated Rhoda—"I owe you nothing. You will have your wages paid with the rest of the servants."

"Oh yes, my wages! Sir James always paid *his* debts; but perhaps he did not think there was any occasion to pay your ladyship's. Here's a little account unsettled between us, I believe;" laying down a paper. "Perhaps, in these troublesome times, it may have slipt your memory."

Rhoda glanced her eye over it, and read these words. "Received twelve pounds from Sarah Wilson, on account of Lady Osbourne, as due from her by bill annexed."

"I have paid you this money," said Rhoda.

"It does not become me to contradict your ladyship, to be sure," replied Wilson, with the most insolent humility; "but I really can remember no such re-payment. Would you have the goodness to mention when it took place?"

At this moment it occurred to Rhoda

that the two hundred pounds falling short of discharging all her debts, Wilson had advanced the money for this bill, as the person wanted his money immediately—a circumstance that the multiplied sorrows, which had lately come so fast upon her, had driven from her memory.

"I recollect now," said Rhoda.

"That's all I want," said Wilson: "I don't mean to put you to any inconvenience. I am sure Lord William will let me have the money, and your ladyship may settle it in your account with him."

"Wretch!" said Rhoda; and counting from her pocket-book twelve bank notes, which was the whole that she was worth, except the hundred pounds just received from Mr. Grantham—"There, begone! and never let me see you more."

Wilson took up the money, and disappeared in an instant; and Rhoda, sinking down upon the sopha whereon she sat, pressed her throbbing head against its side, while she strove, by compressing her

heart strongly with both her hands, to still its beatings, and recover power to breathe.

Rhoda would fain have said—"All this is no fault of mine:" but she could not so deceive herself. True, she was innocent, even in wish, or thought, or apprehension, as to all that related to Lord William; true, that she had not fallen into bondage to her servant either from a vicious confidence, or the meanness of obligation: but she could not the less trace her sorrows to the errors of her heart and of her conduct.

She had married the situation rather than the man; and she had neglected, after marriage, to cultivate those affections in herself and her husband, which can alone make the dignity and happiness of the married state.

"I deserve it all!" was the bitter reflection that burst from her lips, the moment that she had power to utter.—"But how shall I bear it? Friendless, disgraced, degraded!—In debt to him that would

ruin me in this world and the next!—Oh gracious God, support me—thou alone canst!"

She had no power to go on: she sunk upon her knees on the floor: she rested her head on her folded arms on the seat of the sopha, as if with a hope that, by excluding the light, she could shut out the sense of her miseries.

The voice of the woman of the house recalled her attention.

"A lady, Madam."

"I can see nobody," said Rhoda; "and from this moment I charge you not to admit any creature whatever to me."

"The lady says she is a friend."

"A friend!" cried Rhoda, in a voice of agony—"I have no friend!"

"Yes, you have, my dearest Rhoda! a true, an ardent, a most affectionate friend!" burst on the ears of Rhoda, from the long estranged but never-forgotten voice of Frances.

"Oh, leave me, leave me!" cried Rhoda, "or I shall die on the spot!"

"In my arms, then, shall you die," said Frances, in the tenderest accent, and closely embracing her. "But my friend will not so bereave me: you will live to make me happy, and to be happy yourself."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Rhoda, bursting into tears, and gently struggling to withdraw herself from the arms of Frances.

"I must not part with you," said Frances. "Weep here, my Rhoda,—pour out your tears into my bosom."

Rhoda made no farther resistance: she pressed Frances to her heart; she rested her head on her shoulder, and gave a free vent to her sobs and tears.

Frances soothed her with a voice of the truest sympathy; and Rhoda appeared for a few moments to be soothed—then suddenly tearing herself from the arms of her friend—

"Do you know what you are doing?" exclaimed she; "that you are caressing a murderer?"

Frances shuddered.

"Oh, fly me!" cried Rhoda: "there is contagion in my touch! Mr. Wyburg will curse me!"

"My father curse you?" said Frances. Oh, Rhoda, do you so little remember my father, as to fear a curse from him?"

"I know he will do all that is right and good," said Rhoda: "and do I not deserve his curse?"

"I hope not," said Frances, faintly.

"What has brought you here?" said Rhoda: Who is it that you came to pity and relieve?"

"Affection brought me here," replied Frances. "I came to pity the misguided, —to relieve the penitent."

"Misguided, indeed!" repeated Rhoda, "but misguided by my own folly:—a penitent, it is true, but a penitent without hope: for how can reparation be made?"

"My dearest Rhoda, compose yourself: penitence cannot be without hope. ...wever you have erred, you cannot ...ed beyond the healing power of ... power of pardon."

"Pardon!—From whom?" said Rhoda. "Has not he ceased to breathe whose pardon might have restored me to reputation, who might have reconciled me to myself?"

"Oh fix your hopes upon a higher pardon," said Frances—a pardon, which, if it cannot restore you to innocence, can wash out the stains of guilt."

"The stains of guilt!" repeated Rhoda: Do *you* believe that I have lost *more* than reputation?"

"My dearest Rhoda," replied Frances, with the smothered voice of anguish, "let us, at this moment, forbear all retrospection; let us think only how to mitigate the evil that cannot be undone."

"Oh my Frances!" cried Rhoda; "my kind, my charitable Frances! And is it to me, whom you believe a guilty wretch, that you thus speak the words of affection and of hope? How gentle is virtue! how all-sufficient to itself! And does Mr. Ponsonby too ratify your kindness?—But know that, were I the creature you

suppose me to be, these arms should never have embraced you; that chaste bosom should never have been clasped to mine."

The glance of mingled doubt and joy, that shot from the eyes of Frances, crimsoned the cheek of Rhoda.

"Oh I too well deserve," cried she, "that inquiring look! When I withdrew myself from your influence, well might you suppose that I forsook the path of virtue. I bow to the humiliation of intreating you to believe that the wanderings of folly have not terminated in vice."

Frances, scarcely less abashed than Rhoda, clasped her silently to her heart; gently ejaculating, "Thank God!"—and then said—

"My friend, can you forgive me for having allowed myself to suppose, even for a moment to suppose, that it was possible?"

"*All*," interrupted Rhoda, "all that was *wrong*, was possible, was probable. Much has been incurred, but not of the kind of which I see that I am accused: *there* even

my fancy, my very thought is free. There were no grounds—by all that mortals can attest, who mean to speak the purest truth—there were no just grounds for those suspicions which brought the unhappy victim of my folly to the grave; which made me a murderer—a murderer in effect, though not in purpose; and which have left me an object for the finger of disdain and scorn to point at!"

Frances wept; but they were tears of gratitude, of joy, of affection.

"No, my beloved Rhoda!" she replied. "The storm has indeed bent you to the ground, but you will rise again; your virtues but the more fixed, by the concussion they have endured."

"You pour wine and oil into my wounds," said Rhoda, faintly; for the energy of passion being past, she felt all her weakness. "But tell me," said she, "to what do I owe your appearance here, which seems to me as a visitation from Heaven, at the very moment that hope was fled, and the blackest despair had seized my very soul?"

"I had left Byrhley," replied Frances, "to accompany Mr. Ponsonby on a visit to his father, whose home is within fifty miles of London. The public prints informed us —— we lost not a moment in flying to seek you, and going to Brook-street, were from thence directed hither."

A faint tint passed over the cheek of Rhoda: she remained silent and thoughtful for a moment; then speaking—"My guardian angel always! Your efforts to save me have been exerted equally *with* and *against* the *feelings* of your heart! Oh may the second attempt be more successful than the first!" A blush, that died the cheek of Frances with the deepest crimson, shewed that she understood her friend. She threw her arms around Rhoda.

"Never, never *against* the feelings of my heart!" exclaimed she; "for ever did I prefer your and *his happiness* to my own."

"You have secured the one," returned Rhoda, with perfect calmness of voice

and manner; "and if it were possible you would restore the other. But now, my dearest friend, receive my purest, my most ardent congratulations. I shall have one cause of regret the less, now that I have not the lost happiness of Mr. Ponsonby to charge myself with."

Frances returned the caresses of her friend; and then asked her what was her actual situation, and how her wishes to be of service could be fulfilled.

"Before you came to me," replied Rhoda, "there was but a single human being to whom I could look for support or consolation, and the moment that you did come he had withdrawn his sheltering influence; not from caprice, not from unkindness, but from misapprehension—*now* I see how grounded. Until I have gained his good opinion, I can scarcely admit any other consolation. Write to Mr. Grantham, my dearest Frances! Tell him that I am not unworthy of his humanity, and that I entreat

he will visit me. He has promised that he will do so, at my request; and I am persuaded that to receive such a summons will not be less welcome to the benevolence of his nature than the sight of him will be consolatory to me."

Mrs. Ponsonby readily complied; and having done so—

"Now, my dear Rhoda!" said she, "we will suspend all further retrospection. Here I will remain, till you are able, which I see that you are by no means at present, to remove to Byrhley. There my fostering care, and the goodness of Providence, will, I have no doubt, heal the wounds of a heart, which, amidst all its wanderings and mistakes, has preserved its integrity and spotless sincerity."

Rhoda was by this time too much exhausted to be able to testify her love and gratitude to so admirable a friend, otherwise than by caresses and tears: and Frances, having seen her laid upon the sopha, and somewhat renovated by a

cordial which she administered to her, left her for a few moments, that she might communicate to Mr. Ponsonby—who had accompanied her to the house, and who had remained below—the grateful intelligence, that their beloved Rhoda had escaped from the only irretrievable misfortune, guilt.

CHAP. LXXII.

"Friendship, the tenderest power that throws
Her sunshine o'er this scene of woes;
Who soothes to peace the bursting heart,
And heals the wound, but shares the smart!"

Anonymous.

The honest joy of Mr. Ponsonby, on so unhoped-for a blessing, was not less fervent than that of the happy partner of all his feelings.

"Then, my dearest Frances!" said he, "you will again rejoice in the smiles of your friend; you will recover your rights in her heart; and our mutual bliss, which I before believed perfect, will be increased."

"Hasten," said Frances, "to communicate such consolation, such balm, to my

father. I know how his christian mind must have suffered on this occasion; but if he once knows that his poor prodigal child is innocent, he will hold all other misfortunes that may have befallen her light."

Frances, having thus provided for the participation of those she loved, in the fulness of her own satisfaction, returned to brood over it, as she sat silent by the side of the almost inanimate Rhoda; and now it was that, for the first time, she remarked the ravages which "sorrow's tooth" had made on the lovely form and features of her friend. The week of acute misery which she had undergone had not only dimmed her eye, and robbed her cheek of its glow, but it had sunk the one, and hollowed the other: the beautiful arm had lost its roundness; and the emaciated hand, bloodless and transparent, seemed already the prey of death.

"Is this the form," thought Frances, "at whose approach each heart so lately beat, and every eye sparkled with pleasure?"

Are these the charms once so omnipotent? Is this the triumph of beauty and of vanity? Oh virtue, thou only art immortal! Sin and sorrow destroy all beside!"

Rhoda had fallen into a quiet slumber, and Frances was meditating by what "soft appliances" she could best repair the destruction which she witnessed, when Mr. Grantham was announced. Rhoda started, trembled; yet recovering herself, desired that he might be admitted immediately.

"Is it not possible," said Frances, "that I can communicate all that is immediately necessary for Mr. Grantham to know? If, my dearest Rhoda, you must be exposed to a continual succession of agitating scenes, you will put my nursing faculties to hard labour."

"It is possible, my Frances," returned Rhoda affectionately, "that you can do *any* thing—*every* thing. Pray then tell Mr. Grantham that Wilson has betrayed me; that she alone was privy to these visits, which must so justly have made me worth-

less in his eyes;—tell him that I have dismissed her, and that from the disclosure which she has now made of her infamous agency, I have little doubt but to her baseness may be traced the mystery of the note. Perhaps, by pursuing this clue, the mystery of all that is dark in my history may be elucidated, and those who love me be spared the pain of taking *any* degree of my innocence upon trust. Tell him too, my Frances, of your own goodness;—tell him that his cares *are* superseded, but not rendered valueless; and tell him that when my exhausted frame will second the feelings of my heart, I will fall on my knees before him, thank him for his past goodness, and implore him to continue to me his invaluable friendship.

"Hush, hush!" said Frances; "none of these extasies;—trust all to me, and fear not but that you will preserve the friendship of this worthy Mr. Grantham, whom I already feel extremely inclined to love." . . .

Frances went down to Mr. Grantham, who, expecting the appearance of the infamous Wilson as the messenger of Rhoda, was extremely surprised to see enter the room a young and engaging looking female, with the dress and manners of a gentlewoman, and on whose every feature was stamped, in characters not to be mistaken, goodness and graciousness.

These two amiable people soon became mutually acceptable to each other; and as Frances would have entered into some exculpatory explanations in behalf of her friend—"Enough, Madam," said Mr. Grantham, interrupting her;—"to see you near her, to hear from you that I have misjudged her, is sufficient. I have only to humble myself before you both, and to declare that I have not a doubt remaining."

Mr. Grantham had, however, intelligence to give that Frances could not so easily forego:—from him she learnt many particulars that wrung her affectionate heart with sorrow; and even more con-

vinced than Mr. Grantham himself, that in the treachery of Wilson would be found the fullest vindication of that part of Rhoda's conduct with which Lord William St. Quintin had any connection, she strenuously urged him to search the iniquity to the bottom, and to leave no means unemployed to bring into open day "the hidden works of darkness."

"But if this be so," said she, "what then is Lord William St. Quintin?"

"That which I never thought him before," said Mr. Grantham, "a villain!—but what I might always have known him to be, if custom had not so abased the meaning of words as to make it possible that a man may violate every law of his God and of his country, and yet not be esteemed so!"

Frances expressed very lively apprehensions of the consequences, even to the life of her friend, from what she had suffered; but Mr. Grantham encouraged her to hope, what the warm prepossession which he had received in favour of

Frances made him really believe, that the balmy effects of her attentions towards her freind would soon restore her to health and strength.

And this, no doubt, would have been the case, even had she had no auxiliary in the benevolent work.

"But a friend," saith Solomon, "is *made* for adversity:" and no one ever more fully experienced this truth, so honourable to human nature, than did Rhoda—no longer, with such a counter-balance to the visitations of mortality, to be called unfortunate.

Lord and Lady Randolf had returned from Scotland late in the summer; and they were scarcely settled at Temple-Harcourt, when the public intelligence, and private letters from many hands, informed them of the guilt, the disgrace, and the ruin of Rhoda. They hesitated to admit the truth of the first; and they hastened to obviate, as much as possible, the latter.

They repaired instantly to town; and

Lady Randolf proceeding first to Brook-street, as Frances had done, she also was there instructed where to find the object of her search: in finding her, she gained more than she had dared to hope. It was not a repentant sinner whom she was to forgive, but an amiable friend, whom she might delight to love; a friend who, having passed through the fire of adversity, had come out only more refined and purified.

The meeting between herself and Rhoda was equally tender and noble: on Rhoda's side acknowledgment and contrition—on Lady Randolf's a generous forgetfulness of all that had been wrong between them, and an unsuspecting confidence that all would be right in future.

Rhoda made Mrs. Ponsonby known to Lady Randolf, who received her as one whom she had long known and loved; and she proceeded, without delay, to project with her every thing that could contribute to the comfort or accommodation of Rhoda.

The first measure was to remove her to her own house, in St. James's square; where she also claimed the honour of Mrs. Ponsonby as her guest, and where, by the aid of those two amiable women, Rhoda began once more to lift up her dejected head, and to give a promise of being restored to health and peace of mind.

Nor with less zeal, in conjunction with Lord Randolf, did Mr. Grantham pursue the train by which they hoped to detect the whole of Lord William's villany, and to establish the innocence and purity of Rhoda.

By threatenings, and the terrors that ever attend even the most hardened guilt, they succeeded in drawing from Wilson the most explicit detail of all that, at the instigation of Lord William St. Quintin, she had been able to effect towards the ruin of Rhoda. She acknowledged that she had not been unknown to Lord William, even before she entered into Lady Osborne's service, and that since this pe-

riod she had been his hired and affianced agent;—that the two main points of her instructions were to watch the first breakings out of dissatisfaction between Sir James and Rhoda, and the slightest appearance of any pecuniary difficulties on the part of the latter. On the first particular Lord William had regulated his conduct to Rhoda, and on the last had arisen the transaction of the two hundred pounds. Lord Randolf and Mr. Grantham, having drawn up a statement of the above particulars, compelled Wilson to sign it; and then dismissed her with every mark of reprobation which she so well deserved. Lord Randolf and Mr. Grantham would have been more than equally glad to have chastised the principal in this work of wickedness as to punish the agent, but there was no legal way of doing this; and Lord Randolf was too sincerely a christian, and Mr. Grantham had too little acknowledged right to interfere in the affairs of Rhoda, and had too many

family considerations to the contrary, lightly to hazard his life in an act of knight errantry, the probable consequence of which was, however it might personally end with respect to the combatants, the rendering the stain which he wished to efface only the more indelible. Lord Randolf, therefore, contented himself with breaking off abruptly all intercourse, and every relation, even to the interchangement of the slightest accidental civility, with Lord William St. Quintin: and Mr. Grantham gradually withdrew from the intimacy that had been between them, until they became strangers, without any reason for the change being alleged. Other circumstances, however, furnished an apparent reason to the world, which saved Lord William from the necessity of either enquiring into the cause of this change, or being left under the imputation of submitting to it, from a consciousness that it originated from his own ill conduct.

The disgust that Mr. Grantham had received from the unfeeling and malignant behaviour of Lady Emily, on the first eruption of the distresses of Rhoda, had been heightened by her every day's conduct through the progress of them; and her violence against Rhoda, with her defence and commendation of Lord William, had at length arisen to such a height as to have awakened a suspicion in Mr. Grantham that she was not wholly innocent as to the work of ruin that had been accomplished. Accumulating particulars tended every day more and more to confirm this suspicion; and proofs that she could not believe in the guilt which she so confidently affirmed, and that she had even in her own knowledge many circumstances which must have contributed to demonstrate the improbability of its existing, left him no longer a doubt of the fact. Having at length also discovered the hitherto unacknowledged generosity of Rhoda with respect to the house, and the fact that Lord Wil-

liam had furnished the money for the ball—both which instances of bounty he had been taught to believe had originated from Lady Wilton—he no longer hesitated to execute the resolution which he had so early formed, and of which he had never repented; but which he sometimes doubted whether he would be justified in carrying into effect, towards a wife, against whose personal honour he had nothing to allege. But he could sooner have forgiven a breach of chastity, and would have esteemed it less dangerous to the moral instruction of his daughters than such a tissue of duplicity, hard-heartedness, ingratitude, falsehood, and malignity.

Under this impression, he did not delay to announce to Lady Emily his intention of separating himself from her. Her astonishment and dismay were extreme; she had always considered her matrimonial management as a master-piece, and had laid claim to all the honours and had all the insolence of a woman who had but

one virtue to boast. She saw too, with a glance, all that she would lose in point of dignity, by falling into the degraded situation of a wife separated from her husband; and what a lessening of all the circumstances of appearance must, in her own case, attend the situation. Mr. Grantham's fortune was very limited, and she was aware that a small portion of this must come to her, when her claims were circumscribed within her personal wants: the place of her future residence struck too upon her mind. This must probably, from many imperative reasons, be with Lady Wilton; and she knew too much both of the temper of her mother and of her own, to hope for any satisfaction in being so domiciliated.

A piteous—"What have I done?" betrayed the meanness of her fears, and the humiliation that she was willing to submit to, rather than that they should be realized.

"I have already detailed," said Mr. Grantham, "the reasons why I will no

longer hold any domestic intercourse with you, nor longer suffer that you shall have any direction of the minds of my children. Your provision shall be as ample as I have the means to make it; for there are no sacrifices which I should not prefer to continuing to live with a person who has lost every particle of my esteem."

The determined tone, with which these words were uttered, left Lady Emily no hopes of softening Mr. Grantham by submission; she therefore indemnified herself by giving way to the violence and malice of her temper. Mr. Grantham bore all with the patience of a Socrates; and when the storm was passed, only observed that he was going to make the necessary communication to Lady Wilton; and that, whenever it would suit Lady Emily's convenience to leave his house, he should be glad to have it to himself.

"Your house!" replied Lady Emily, with increasing rage—"It is *my* house!

My dear Lady Hampton lent it to me, not to you: and I will remain in it as long as I please."

"I thank you, Madam," replied Mr. Grantham, "for making my task so easy. I allow your right to this house: may it be less fatal to you than the one which you last owed to the hand of a friend! Lady Osbourne's generosity to you enabled you the better to contribute to her ruin, and has consummated your own!—I quit the habitation which you hold from Lady Hampton, to enter it no more!"

Mr. Grantham withdrew; and having communicated to Lady Wilton his unalterable resolution of separating himself from her daughter, and of the provision that he would make for her, he gave the necessary orders to his servants, and in twelve hours was on his road to Dorsetshire.

This separation naturally placed a distance between Mr. Grantham and Lord William Saint Quintin; and as the residence of the former was henceforth to be

usually in the country, the breach between them passed with little observation.

But not for this did Lord William escape without a share of that chastisement, which ought to have been dealt to him with so full a measure. So much of the truth found its way into the world, and the exclamations, the indiscretions, and the violence of Lady Emily, so assisted its elicitation, that Lord William sunk much below the level of estimation which he had hitherto held in society. Something of disgrace attached to any intimate intercourse with him; and mothers did not only warn their daughters that "Lord William St. Quintin was no marrying man," but husbands also told their wives to shun him, as they would avoid destruction.

Lady Emily, no longer able to maintain her claims to the qualities of a "pattern wife," and unsupported even by the shadow of "pomp or circumstance," found her influence narrowed to a circle of people whom in her heart she despised;

and her talents reduced to the contemptible occupation of finding resources to eke out an income, which, though sufficient to have rendered a good woman happy, was no more than a perpetual occasion of irritation to a bad one.

CHAP. LXXIII.



" Forth with a father's joy, the holy man
To meet the poor returning pilgrim ran :
The mourner bowed with agony and shame,
Clung round his knees, and called upon his name."

Montgomery.

The first use, that Rhoda made of her returning power of action, was to transmit to Mr. Willoughby the boxes which contained the jewelry and ornaments bestowed upon her by Sir James. She retained nothing but his picture, the *all* that remained to her of one whom she had too late begun to love; and whose memory was the more endeared to her, the longer she reflected on his conduct towards her as it now appeared, cleared from the clouds of prejudice and

passion. She preserved this memorial, not less as a gratification of her feelings than as a remembrancer of the faulty past, and a guardian for the future. She considered it as a sacred talisman, under whose influence the swellings of vanity must subside, and the boastings of self-confidence must dissolve into thin air. All the rest she abandoned without a single regret; or if any feeling of the sort remained, it was that by this resignation she gave up the only immediate means in her power of discharging her debt to Lord William. This was an obligation of so galling a nature, as rendered all peace of mind impossible so long as she remained under it; but she submitted to this, as to every other part of her punishment, with a meekness that shewed her contrition not to be a mere cowardly shrinking from the consequences of misconduct, but the genuine reformation of the heart, the actual abjuration of all that was wrong. Grateful for, and not reluctant in every other particular to gratify her friends, by receiving

from them every act of kindness which could contribute to alleviate retrospections, which were at moments almost too heavy for endurance, she carefully endeavoured to conceal from all that part of her bosom's misery which the debt to Lord William St. Quintin inflicted. Here she admitted no other mitigation than what she could derive from a firm resolution, that by the most rigid economy, and the sacrifice of every personal comfort, she would make every passing hour give its tribute towards its discharge.

But the delicacy and generosity of her friends rendered all such concealment nugatory: they needed not to be told of an evil which they knew must exist, nor were they tardy in applying the remedy.

"Now, my dear," said Lady Randolf, one day, putting a paper into Rhoda's hand, "you must be my debtor for this: pay me when and how you will, but say not a word about the matter."

Rhoda, who instantly understood her, threw her arms round Lady Randolf, and hid her face in her bosom. "No, no!"

said she: "let my punishment be drawn out into all its natural length, that I may the better expiate the follies which have produced it."

"You will not choose," said Lady Randolf, "to be indebted rather to Lord William St. Quintin than to me?"

"Oh, no!" said Rhoda, "but ——"

"But!" interrupted Lady Randolf, "no, not *but:* I will finish the sentence; it must be 'and.' 'And I thankfully accept the means of closing all accounts with him for ever.'"

The grateful turn of Rhoda's eye shewed how accurately her friend had spoken her feelings.

"Then be it so," said Rhoda; "but remember the conditions, 'when and how I please.'"

"I again repeat them," said Lady Randolf; "I have no intention, I assure you, of imposing upon you even the shadow of a favour."

"And I," said Rhoda, "find my greatest happiness in acknowledging that I owe you more than I can ever discharge."

Rhoda lost not a moment in profiting by the means thus obtained of liberating herself from the shackles which the villany of Lord William had thrown around her: she inclosed notes for two hundred pounds in a paper, on which she had written these words—

"Lady Osbourne returns to Lord William St. Quintin the two hundred pounds, for which she became so unconsciously indebted to him; and she cannot return the money without accompanying it with an assurance, that no difficulties, however rigorous, could have induced her knowingly to have received such an obligation at his hands."

The calm dignity with which, in thus closing her unfortunate intercourse with Lord William St. Quintin, Rhoda forbore to utter a single reproach, arose not from pride; it originated from the humble estimation which she had newly learnt to take of her own character; and which, while it stilled all angry feelings, led her

to dwell more on the errors of her own conduct than the crimes of others. And let it not be supposed, that in any case virtue need be indebted to vice for any motive by which to uphold herself: she can, from her own stock, supply every nobler feeling of her mind, and on the lowest ground can erect the loftiest fabric.

Rhoda had now so far recovered her strength, that even the timid anxiety of Mrs. Ponsonby and Lady Randolf could find no reasonable cause to oppose her earnest desire to remove to Byrhley.

"Until I have seen my paternal Mr. Wyburg," said she, "until I have received his pardon and his blessing, I must feel myself in a state of reprobation: he only can seal that pardon, which can embolden me to look up to a higher act of grace; and until I can so presume, the wounds of my soul may be closed, but they cannot be healed."

On these pleadings, Lady Randolf yielded Rhoda to the care and affections of Mrs. Ponsonby, returning herself to

Temple-Harcourt; where, at Rhoda's request, she had changed her intention of preparing her an apartment in her own house to the fitting up two rooms of a cottage, on the outskirts of the pleasure-ground.

The absolute retirement, in which Rhoda purposed to live for some time to come, she foresaw could only be secured in a habitation of her own; and unwilling alike to submit to restraint herself, or to impose it upon others, she hoped, by these means, while she avoided doing either, that she should still retain all the consolatory privileges and daily intercourse with friends so inestimable as Lord and Lady Randolf.

In preferring the vicinity of Temple-Harcourt, for her residence, to that of Byrhley, she was actuated by a feeling of delicacy, that may be better understood than defined. It was no remaining consciousness of the influence which Mr. Ponsonby had once had over her mind, and still less any remnants of vanity, that might have suggested the power which she

might still retain over his: it was a remembrance of the past, rather than any reference to the future, and a fear of intrusion where her place was supplied. There was still a further reason which turned her thoughts from Byrhley, and this was the neighbourhood of Strictland Hall; she could not in any case have expected sympathy or consolation from either Lady Elizabeth or Sir William; she had lost all her consequence in the eyes of the one, and the other would only have said, that "it was a pity his pretty niece had so disgraced herself." But at this time neither Lady Elizabeth nor Sir William could have had leisure either to have reproached or to have pitied her. What affections they had were all engrossed by a new daughter-in-law, which Mr. Strictland had just given them. In his haste to provide an heir for the Strictland estate, this gentleman had somewhat violated even the *forms* of decency. The desire to secure the prize, while it was to be had, had over-ruled all scruples on this head;

and as the lady, who was to bestow forty thousand pounds, was as willing to give it as the gentleman who was to receive was eager to possess it, no delay beyond the necessary law preliminaries, which were to make sure the great objects of each party, intervened between the proposal and the marriage.

The lady, as she was rich, so she was young; and to these two qualities alone she owed the honour of being chosen by Mr. Strictland; while the immediate exaltation to the rank of a gentlewoman, with the reversionary prospect of a baronetage, had been the inducements of the lady.

"Mamma Lady Elizabeth," and "Papa Sir William," were sounds that already delighted her ears; and the anticipation of her own "ladyship" was still more intoxicating. The admiration which she expressed for every thing at "the Hall," and the respect which she manifested to Lady Elizabeth and Sir William, healed all the wounds of the mortified vanity

that the lowness of her birth had inflicted; and as she was good-humoured and docile, Lady Elizabeth soon found more comfort from the daughter-in-law on which she looked down, than she had ever experienced from the one whose elegance and fashion were the themes of her panegyric and her boast. The new Mrs. Strictland was always at hand, at once to save Lady Elizabeth all trouble, and to bear all the waywardness of her temper without weariness or complaint; nor was she less acceptable to her as an untired and eager listener to all the antiquated stories of Lady Elizabeth's former glories; glories which the young lady fondly hoped that she should one day make her own.

At present the scene of her greatness was confined to "the Hall." Here Mr. Strictland had established himself, believing that he could be a better steward to his father than any other person, and not being at all insensible to the advan-

tages of having no house bills or assessed taxes to pay.

Had the protection of such a family been offered to Rhoda, she could not, with any tolerable chance for happiness or comfort, have accepted the offer; and she was therefore best pleased to establish herself in a manner that would not bring the question either before her relations or others, why she was not received at Strictland Hall.

By easy stages, and supported by the unwearied attentions of Frances and the cheerful unembarassed friendship of Mr. Ponsonby, Rhoda made her journey into Staffordshire. How unlike, in every particular, from that which scarcely two years before had conveyed her from her first home, and best friends! The retrospect pressed hard upon her feelings, and sunk her spirits almost to despondency; but Rhoda was no longer the disobedient and rebellious child, who daringly quarrels with the parent for

withdrawing at his will the indulgencies which he has granted. She, who refused to be comforted when she saw the protector of her infant days sink into the grave at the protracted period of fourscore years, now meekly bowed her head under the deprivation of all that the youthful heart delights in, or the youthful spirit looks forward to. Such are the different issues of self-will and humility; and Rhoda, when arrived at Byrhley, found herself in the presence of Mr. Wyburg, overcome by a sense of error, cast herself before him, and folding her arms around his knees, while she bowed her face upon them, cried out, "Oh, that I had never quitted this beloved spot! I always told you, that here alone for me was safety!"

"And I told you, my dearest child," said the wise and benevolent pastor, "that safety was not virtue. You have incurred danger; you have endured sorrow; but you have gained virtue. The purchase is richly worth the prize!"

Of this truth, which ought to be inscribed in characters distinct and indelible on every human bosom, Rhoda became every day more and more sensible, and under its restoring influence, the wounds inflicted by indiscretion, and its consequent punishment, became radically healed.

Her aspirations hitherto had been "like the risings of the lark:" she had "soared, and thought to reach her heaven; but she had been beaten back by the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and her motion had been irregular and inconstant." The storm, however, was now over. She made a prosperous flight, and rose and sung as if she had learnt motion and music from an angel.

She had already reposed a month in the shades of Byrhley, and felt as if she would have been happy to have remained there for ever; but she no longer looked to her wishes as the rule for her actions. The reasons, which had determined the choice of her residence, remained un-

changed, and she yielded to the claims which Lady Randolf affectionately pressed. In the little domicile prepared for her by this excellent friend she found every comfort that her chastened mind required, and here she lived secluded from every eye but the eye of friendship, in the rigid prosecution of that economy which could alone enable her to discharge the pecuniary part of the weight of obligation that was against her. This was done, not only without regret, but with a spirit of cheerfulness that made it a pleasure, and she had hence another proof how little the advantages, for which she had formerly sacrificed so much, could contribute to the real happiness of life. So contrary are the results of the sacrifices made *to* principle and *of* principle !

CHAP. LXXIV.

"—— Methinks if you would know
How visitations of calamity
Affect the pious soul, 'tis shewn you there!
Look yonder at that cloud, which through the sky
Sailing alone, doth cross in her career
The rolling moon!—I watch'd it as it came,
And deemed the deep opake would blot her beams:-
But melting, like a wreath of snow, it hangs
In folds of wavy silver round, and clothes
The orb with richer beauties than her own;
Then, passing, leaves her in her light serene."

Southey.

At this period, when Rhoda believed that the eventful history of her life was closed, she received the following letter:

"Madam,

"From a misconception, not more fatal to himself, than it was injurious

to you, my relation, the late Sir James Osbourne was induced to allot, as a provision for you after his death, a proportion of his property, equally inadequate to the whole, and to the claims which your situation and your merits gave you upon him.

"Had not the lamented event taken place, which deprived him of the power of remedying this momentary injustice of his thought, there can be no doubt but that the remainder of his life, and the dispositions that would have been to take effect after it, would have been directed to obliterate alike from the apprehension of the world, and from your recollection, that there ever was a moment in which the misconduct of others had suspended the influence of your virtues.

"Permit me, Madam, as the representative of a family of which you are so bright an ornament, and as legalizing my right to the possessions which belong to it, to repair, as far as my power extends, the injustice which from circum-

stances rather than intention has been done to you.

"You will receive with this letter the proper instrument from whence your right to a clear annual income of three thousand pounds will be established, and a deed of gift, by which you enter into the immediate possession of five thousand pounds.

"I have also taken the liberty of restoring some trifling ornaments, which under no view of the case can possibly belong to any one but yourself, and which should not have remained so long out of your possession, had I been sooner apprised that they were in mine.

"I beg you, Madam, to believe me, with the most sincere respect and esteem,

Madam,

your very humble

and obedient servant,

Charles St. John Osbourne."

So noble and unequivocal a proof of the full restoration of her character, even to the understanding of those who knew

her conduct only from the impartial testimony of truth, thrilled the heart of Rhoda with delight and gratitude.

She cast her eyes to heaven in speechless thankfulness; and then bowed her head upon her breast in deep humiliation for the preservation of a blessing which she had so carelessly guarded.

Her next thought was the propriety of accepting so large a munificence from a stranger. This scruple was, however, fully done away, when, by communication with her friends, she thoroughly understood the circumstances of her own case and those of her benefactor.

She now learnt that could she have endured to have applied to legal relief, a provision so entirely disproportioned to his property, as that appointed by Sir James, and made so evidently under the impression of a mistaken judgment, would, in all probability, have been set aside; and that therefore what Sir Charles Osbourne voluntarily offered could only be the *excess* of what she might legally

have claimed. Any scruple that she might feel to taking away so large a proportion of his property also vanished, when she was apprised of the pecuniary situation of Sir Charles himself.

He was a man some years older than Sir James; who, when he so unexpectedly succeeded to the ample possessions of his relation, was living in the bosom of a numerous family, with the respectability and in the habits of gentlemanly life, on a property, which, though not large, was sufficient to support the station to which he had been born; and which would nearly cupply the deficiency which his generosity to Rhoda had made in the rent-roll of Sir James. His characte equally with his circumstances, obviated every scruple which the most delicate nicety or the sense of obligation could have suggested.

Of plain habits, and unostentatious rectitude, he looked not on the right or the left, but determined at once, by the fair and the equitable;—and having once

discerned what this was, the question with him was decided.

A due provision for the widow of his predecessor, he considered as one of the first debts that on his account he had to discharge; and having investigated the whole of the case, and having convinced himself of the innocence of Rhoda, and the misapprehension under which Sir James had acted, he would as soon have thought of refusing to pay the debts of his tradesmen as have neglected to repair the injustice done to his widow. If, on this occasion, something of a softer feeling mingled with his rigid sense of right, it was of a kind which only gave him another claim to the gratitude of Rhoda—he felt as a father!

He had heard of the charms and the attractions of Rhoda, when he might have viewed her with an evil eye, as intervening between him and his hopes: but he then only thought of her as a lovely woman, proceeding in the dangerous race

of the world. A beloved daughter of his own was just starting into womanhood. When he was told of Rhoda's dereliction from the paths of honour, and her consequent degradation, his thoughts again turned to his daughter:—he trembled. What Rhoda was Julia might be! It was, therefore, as if this daughter had escaped from guilt and disgrace, when he learnt that Rhoda was innocent.

Such are the feelings of a good parent; and such pure guardians of the virtues are the domestic affections.

Rhoda, thus unshackled by any consideration that, could impeach either her generosity or her delicacy, joyfully and gratefully accepted the boon that was offered to her. She wrote to Sir Charles such a letter as feelings ardent and pure as hers must dictate; and intreated that, in addition to his other favours, she might be admitted to the honour of his personal acquaintance. The request was acceded to with the most affectionate readiness,

and the world once more beheld Rhoda an honoured and respected member of the Osbourne family.

Restored to reputation,—in the enjoyment of affluence,—the cherished object of friendship, that "solace and splendor of private life,"—was it yet possible that Rhoda should escape the consequences of the past? Could any lengthened period of prosperous existence erase from her memory the impression, that to the being who had loved her with passion, and cherished her with kindness, she had been the instrument of evil—of irreparable—it might be (awful thought!) of immortal evil?

The follies which she had abjured, and the virtues that she cultivated, alike forbad such forgetfulness. She felt that the promise of her youth was blighted,—the exercise of her talents circumscribed,—the affections of her heart deadened.

Yet not for this did she murmur. She bowed with meek submission to the chastisements of her heavenly Father, and

gratefully enjoyed the blessings which his hand still preserved to her.

Such is the history of Rhoda! If it have afforded an innocent amusement to any, I shall be glad. If it shall have exemplified that much guilt may be incurred where little was intended,—that vanity is not a venial frailty, nor self-confidence and love of distinction safe counsellers,—that nothing but a preferable love for the husband can sanctify the marriage bond, and that chastity alone will not make a good wife;—and if such exemplifications shall lead the steps of one individual from the ways of worldly wisdom and vain glory into the paths of Christian morality, or retain them there, I shall have had my reward!

THE END.

T. Davison, Lombard street,
Whitefriars, London.

